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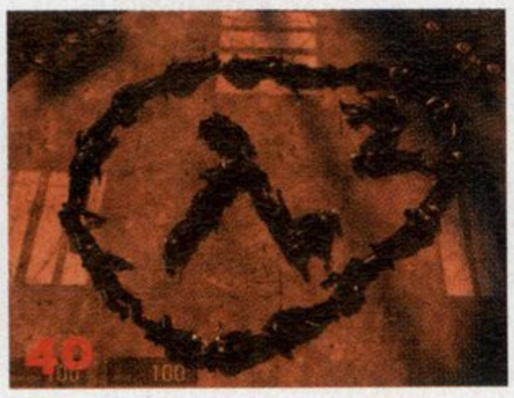
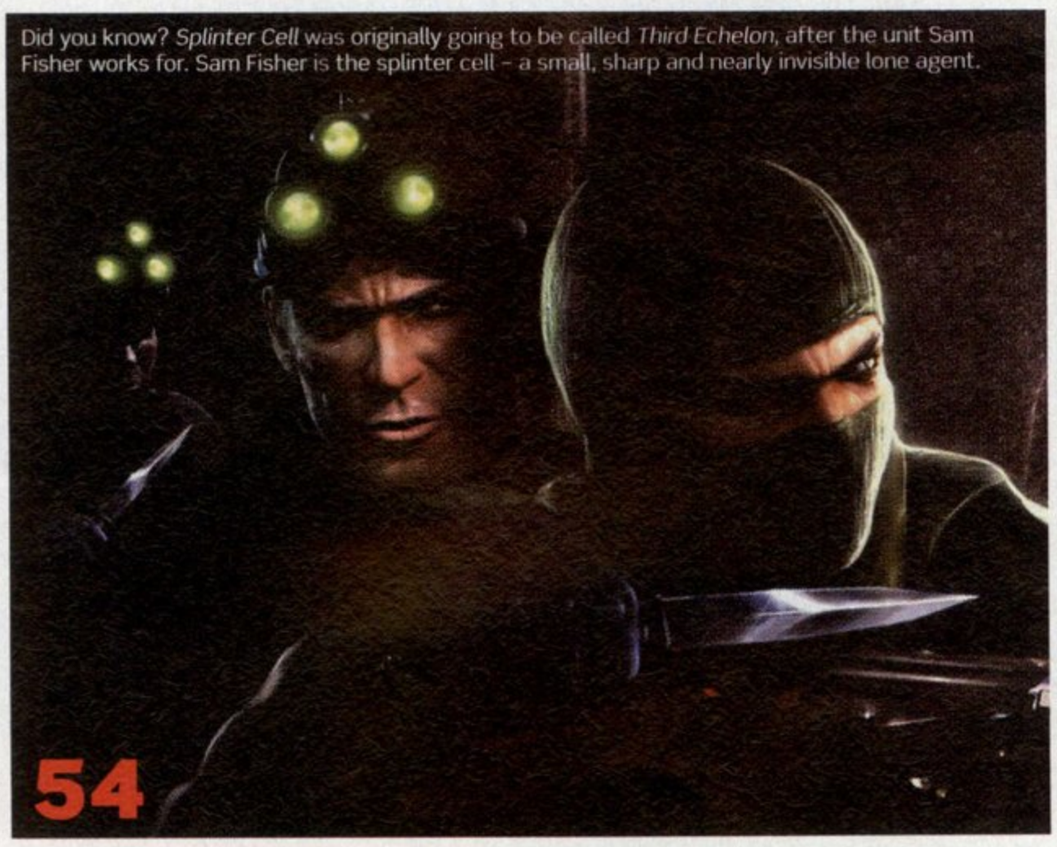
DERWENT HOWARD

This month, we've been...

GODLIKE...
...talking to *Black & White 2* developers Lionhead, who want you to wield limitless power.



CHUCKLING...
...at the funny screenshots you've been sending us this past month.


Did you know? *Splinter Cell* was originally going to be called *Third Echelon*, after the unit Sam Fisher works for. Sam Fisher is the splinter cell - a small, sharp and nearly invisible lone agent.
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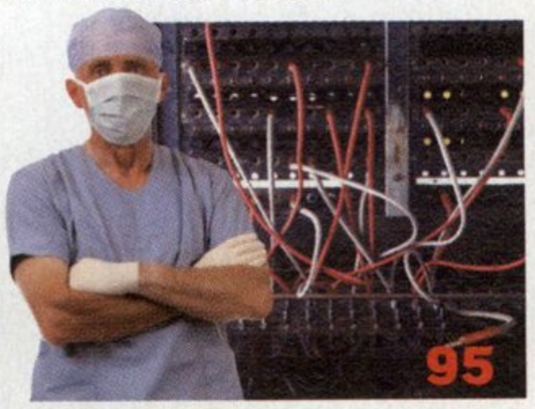
STRIKING FROM SHADOWS...

FINAL VERDICT ...in *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory*. Sam Fisher returns to single-handedly battle international terrorism. He's armed with little more than a knife, a pistol, and millions of dollars worth of gadgets. How does he do it? And does he still do it well?

BASHING BUTTONS...
...to figure out which peripherals give you the best bang-for-buck gaming experience.



SOOTHING...
...the pesky problems that arise from unwanted adware and other software leeches.

Get ready for a change

I'm thinking about E3 already, and if you care about how you'll be gaming over the next year or two, you probably should too. Gaming is changing, not so much on the reliable PC front, but this year's E3 is going to have more handheld and mobile gaming on display than ever before.

How will that affect PC gaming? Well, the direct way will be a host of innovative ideas for simplistic network gaming, which will in turn bring demand for PC versions for Internet play. The average Joe will start expecting capabilities we've had access to for years on PC, and there's always more money for brainstorming where the average Joe is concerned.

At the risk of sounding prophetic, I can foresee a whole bunch of developers who'll want to work with mobile or handheld gaming for various reasons, and some of them will leave PC development to do so.

Ultimately this may not be a bad thing, as it may help keep PC gaming true to itself.

The lure of less technicality and a bigger market may also help thin out teams that aren't really into making complicated clones to get where they want. Touch wood, it could help cut off the bottom end of the spectrum of gaming quality.

Best not stare too far into the future, though, as there're games taking their genres forward that are landing right now – just peruse our reviews. At least we can rest assured whatever changes may come won't ever kill off our preferred gaming platform when it's in this sort of form. Now go lose yourself in these games quickly before someone hands you a PSP or a NDS... For God's sake!

DAN TOOSE
EDITOR

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PC Games Addict for less, with a free game thrown in. If you think that sounds like a steal, that's because it's the stealth-sim, **Stolen**.

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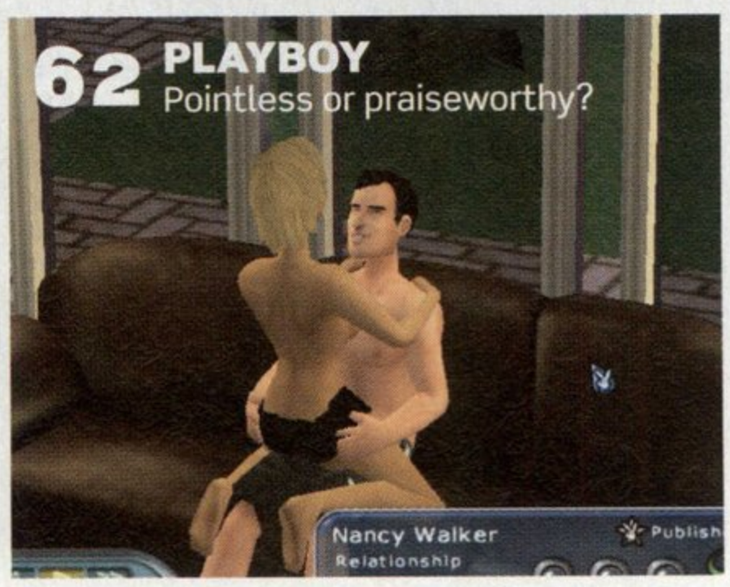

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Less reliable than a gypsy...

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Extra Fable-ous

Sharpen those swords!

1.4 million Xbox owners will miss out on the extras. Them's the breaks.

Another Xbox game, another PC conversion. Hot on the heels of its successes on Xbox, Microsoft has announced that its action RPG, *Fable: The Lost Chapters* is making its way to PC this Spring.

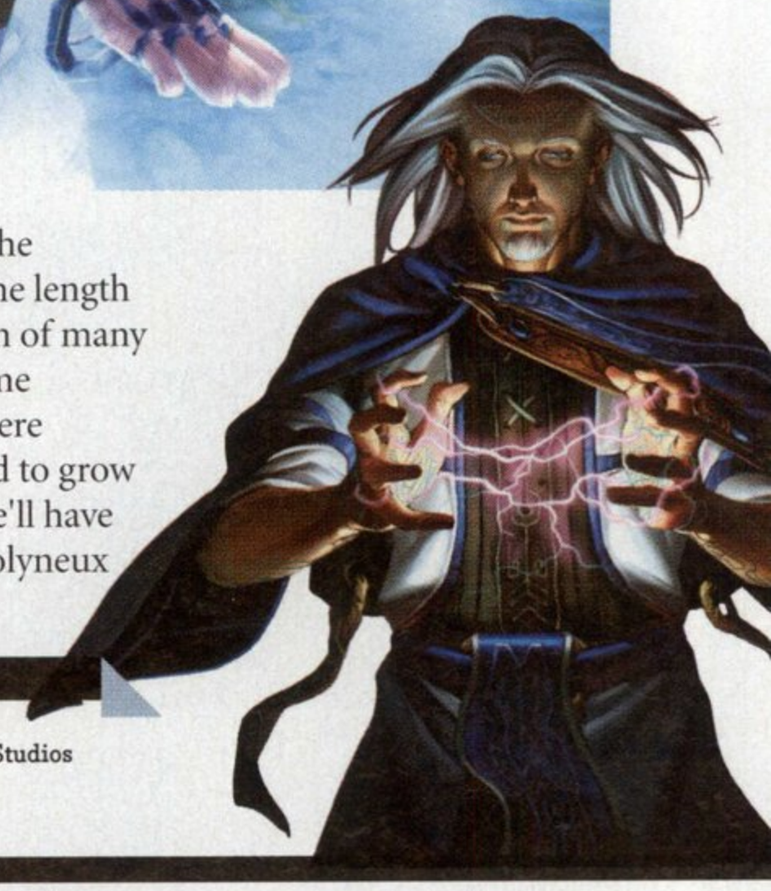
Developed by Peter Molyneux's Lionhead Studios, *Fable* was an ambitious RPG that allowed players to see their character grow from childhood into adulthood. Their abilities, appearance and reputation were the direct consequence of their actions, made possible by the freedom to choose between heroism and villainy. Save a villager from bandits? +10 points for heroics. Eat a cute little chicken? +10 for evil.

More novel are the towns, NPCs and side-quests, where players can get pissed at the local pub, attract the ladies (and gents) with the latest tats and hairstyles, and garner a respectable collection of wives, girlfriends and lustful admirers across several towns.

Eat a cute little chicken? +10 for evil.

Taking place in a perpetual fantasy world that phases between night and day, players will be able to continue questing even after the final credits have rolled.

Fable: The Lost Chapters promises the usual checklist of improvements – new missions, more weapons, better customisation and enhanced graphics over the Xbox version. The question will be whether Lionhead can do any justice in answering the criticisms that were leveled at its console release, such as the shortness of game length and the omission of many promised in-game features (trees were initially intended to grow in real-time). We'll have more on this Molyneux title as it breaks.



README

Publisher Microsoft
Developer Lionhead Studios
ETA Spring 2005

SAY *WHAT*?
The month in tongues

Factory Interactive
"*RattHunter* is a traditional first-person shooter set in a hi-tech environment. It does not push the envelope or bring something fresh to the genre, since we feel that there is little place for innovation in today's action games market. It is, however, solid, polished and smart. Developers lay the emphasis on original ideas in visualisation and gameplay design."

An extended Say What from us, to celebrate Factory Interactive's press release for their upcoming FPS. While such refreshing honesty is remarkable, if there's really no place for innovation in gaming then why don't we all give up now? It certainly sounds like that's what Factory have done.

The Price of a free MMORPG

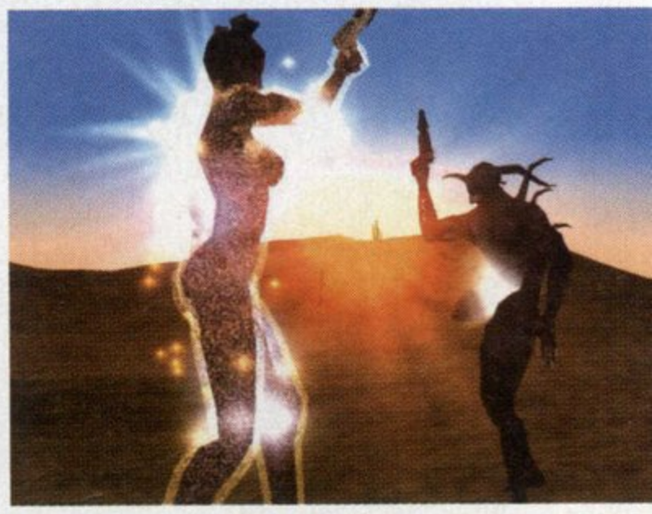
Billboards coming to a MMORPG near you!

It's insidious and everywhere, and has been causing a minor ruckus within the gaming community about whether it has a place in our games. We refer, of course, to advertising. The point is about to become moot for players of the free version of *Anarchy Online* – Funcom have signed a deal with Massive Incorporated to integrate advertising billboards throughout the game.

Funcom CEO Trond Aas believes gamers want in-game advertising because of the sense of heightened realism it offers – it's a brave move, and a smart one. If players severely object to the advertising, they can simply subscribe. If they don't, then there's no harm done and Funcom have an additional source of revenue.

It might even drive the cost of games down.

Of course, we've yet to see whether it can be introduced with any subtlety, or how well it will be received by the market, but Funcom have indicated that future online titles may follow the same model depending upon the success of this initial run.



gobbets

Do the Vietcongo (2) › Take Two will hate us for this, but we've "acquired" some details of their up-and-coming 'Nammer – *Vietcong 2*. There's a strong suggestion that it'll have Battlefield-style vehicles. The original took us on chopper rides, as a gunner firing into the jungle below. This time around, we'll hopefully be able to take control of Hueys, PT boats, tanks and Marlon Brando.

The WoW factor

The makers of *EverQuest* are playing *World of Warcraft* right now. "I've played the heck out of it and I love it" revealed John Smedley, Sony Online's President, in a letter to the gaming community last month. Like Ronald McDonald confessing his current meal of choice is finger lickin' good, Smedley's honesty is testament to *WoW*'s impact on the gaming world.

Sales figures are just one side of the story. Add to Europe's 380,000 first weekend sales the figures from Australia, the US and Korea, and Blizzard have a million seller. But it's the influx of new players and monthly subscriptions that's significant.

Pre-*WoW* the suits predicted that the European market for MMORPG's was around 250,000. *WoW* took just one weekend to destroy that notion.

In the mid term it means MMO publishers like Sony and NCsoft are hurting. Sony in particular spent February desperately trying to plug the subscriber leak from their games. An *EverQuest II* free trial – just a few months after EQ's release, and that of another *EverQuest* expansion pack. While a shocked *Star Wars Galaxies* community was bombarded with news of four major enhancements in development. Blizzard have handed Sony a wake-up call. "They keep us honest. They keep us focused and they force us to play with our 'A' game" remarked Smedley.

It's like Ronald McDonald confessing his current meal of choice is finger lickin' good

It begs the question, why does it take competition and the threat of lost revenue to "force" Sony to play their "A" game? Hasn't the loyalty of a huge subscriber base and their $10 a month been enough?

But that's all best forgotten as far as Sony are concerned. They and the entire MMORPG market are looking forward. *WoW*'s impact has drawn a line in the sand that's ensured that the future for Blizzard, Sony, NCsoft et al is looking mighty prosperous. Its accessibility and instant gratification has brought in thousands of new players, each with credit cards to fight over.

As Smedley says. "We need to be about larger scale mass-entertainment". According to Sony the "hardcore" MMORPGs probably can't cut it anymore. Disconcerting news to the thousands of gamers already playing and paying for them. The "hardcore" may well find themselves sidelined while publishers pursue the gleaming pot of gold that *WoW* has unearthed.

These shots are from the original game. Sequel pics next ish.
Sgt. Jones
Submachine Gunner
My pleasure, sir. It's pretty bad everywhere, take your pick. Sgt. Ramirez, you and your boys will hit the crossroads just south of Foy.
8 | 184

Call of Duty 2

Is there an echo in here?

Odd to think, one of the most respected developers of first-person shooters have only really made one game. Admittedly Infinity Ward were formed by some escapees from the *Medal of Honour* team, but *Call of Duty* has propelled them to a lofty status in the coding pecking order.

If the appearance of last year's expansion, *United Assault*, was no surprise, then neither is this sequel, which has been all but announced. With the original eclipsing even the mighty *Medal of Honour*, excitement is high for the secretive second in the series. With information at a minimum, we asked resident ass-tronomer Rosstradamus for his predictions for *Call of Duty 2*. "Guns there will be!" said the cowled one. Unimpressed, we tightened the thumbscrews. "Three campaigns, forsooth, mirroring the first game! British, Yankee and Russian... Ouch! And, truly, I see sand, the cruel sands of time, whipping across the sun-blistered plains of North Africa. Tanks! Tanks shall be involved, I foresee. Now, leave me!"

And then we burned him as a witch. More on *Call of Duty 2* next month.

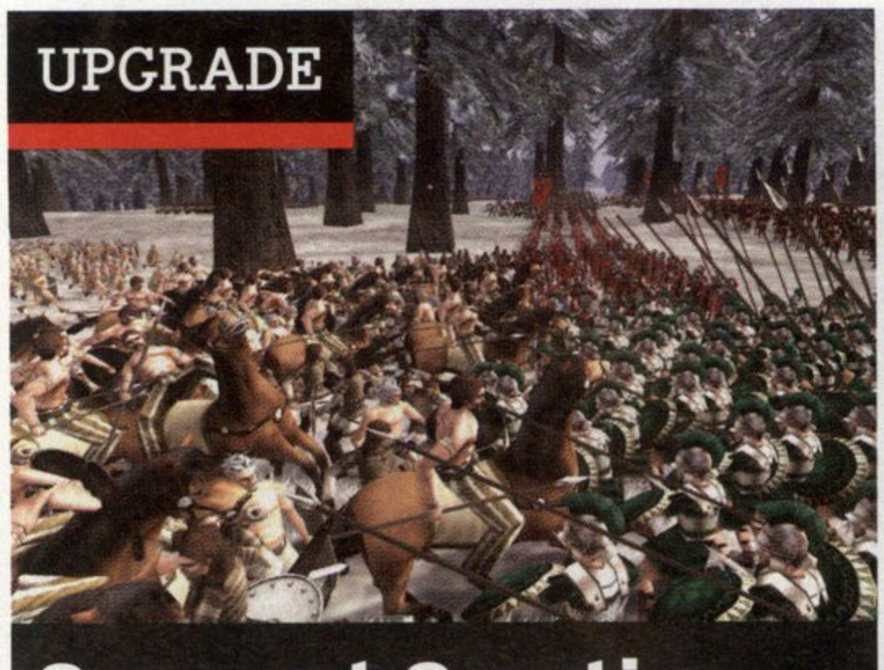
Clouds: great for target practice.

README

Publisher Activision
Developer Infinity Ward
ETA In time for Christmas

gobbets

Pepperownage › Flat food delivery service Pizza Hut are now making their wares available in *EverQuest 2*. Typing /pizza into the chat dialogue will bring up Pizza Hut's online menu, allowing for delivery right to your door. That's right, flat-food and fine toppings available from a virtual food vendor, without leaving your fine seat. The end of the world approacheth.



UPGRADE

Sega get Creative...

Japanese software giant and former console manufacturer, Sega, has successfully acquired the UK and Australian-based developer, Creative Assembly.

Creative Assembly, founded in 1997, is best known to the PC games market as the development studio responsible for the *Total War* series, and has most recently been earning nothing but praise for its seminal *Rome: Total War*.

"We are thrilled to be working with a development team renowned for its quality and highly commercial products" said Mike Hayes, President and COO of Sega Europe, who also suggested that The Creative Assembly is but the first in a series of portfolio-building acquisitions for Sega.

The Creative Assembly's Managing Director, Tim Ansell, commented, "We are delighted to have signed with Sega, a company which we quickly realised shared our creative vision and were appreciative of our ambition... for future growth as a developer." He also added, "the marrying of two such popular brands is set to bring highly compelling content for game enthusiasts around the world".

The first game that's expected to spawn from this 'marriage' is *Spartan: Total Warrior*, which is headed to the major console platforms.

This partnering should be of no surprise to pundits who've monitored The Creative Assembly's rapidly expanding presence in the gaming landscape. However, no further announcements have been made in regards to future PC game development. We'll have the first details here for you as soon as they emerge.

The Matrix Revolutions Keanu Reeves © Warner Brothers International Television

The Matrix Path of Neo

He salts it in the winter, apparently

Slip on the shades and visit Goths 'R' Us – there's another *Matrix* game on the horizon. *The Path of Neo* follows the chosen one's route through the films, from number cruncher to demigod. We'll slip into his size tens and high-kick our way through all the major battles with the machines, as he tries to save humanity from their Duracell fate.

About time, as the story of the previous game, *Enter the Matrix*, was all about the actions of peripheral characters. Not what you want of a movie conversion. No, you want to take part in *those* battles, the ones that scratched your retinas on the big screen. The battle in the lobby from the first film, with more bullet impacts than WWII. Or That Bit With The Helicopter rescuing Morpheus, using a minigun to carve a hole in the side of the office.

The second and third films upped the action stakes: Neo took a beating in a huge brawl against 100 cloned agents, and took time to fight his way through the real world to the heart of the machines. Can the developers, Shiny, pull all that off in-game? Not without a major upgrade to the *Enter The Matrix* engine.

Accordingly, we expect *Neo* to fall back on at least some footage from the movies, although the Wachowskis should also be scripting new action for it. Let's just hope Shiny can make it a bit more polished this time around.

README

Publisher Atari
Developer Shiny Interactive
ETA Christmas

GfK THE PC TOP 10 CHART

Going Sim-Crazy

It's no surprise to see the charts dominated by *Sims* games once again, but there's a sim of a different kind lurking about this month in the form of *Playboy the Mansion*.

The PC market wasn't quite as enamoured with Hugh Hefner's digital titty-fest as their console-playing cousins, but one must wonder if they're up to anything better with the campus antics of *Sims 2: University*.

Getting up to mischief on campus in *The Sims 2 University*

POSITION	GAME	PUBLISHER
1 (NE)	*The Sims 2: University*	EA
2 (1)	*The Sims 2*	EA
3 (NE)	*The Sims Full House*	EA
4 (3)	*Half-Life 2*	Vivendi
5 (2)	*World of Warcraft*	Vivendi
6 (4)	*The Sims Deluxe*	EA
7 (5)	*Star Wars Knights of the Old Republic 2*	EA
8 (NE)	*Playboy the Mansion*	Ubisoft
9 (RE)	*C&C Generals Classic*	EA
10 (8)	*The Sims: Unleashed*	EA

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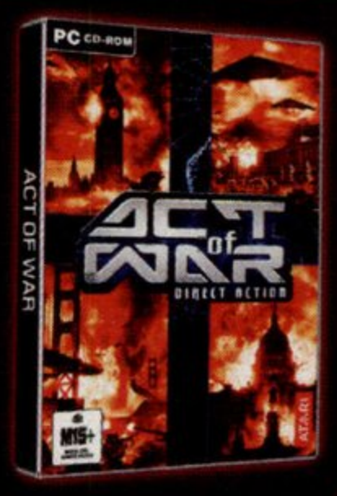

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Devil's Advocate

Violence in games: it must be crushed from existence

STEVE WILLIAMS
...considers life to be contingent and both action and inaction ultimately futile, which has led him to question *why* he should pay so much tax. Oh well, for one endlessly perplexed by his own paradox, he manages to form rather coherent sentences.

Most recently it was *Manhunt*. The children! The spiralling filth! Our world is dying! Once again, the cry went up: Ban This Sick Filth.

Yes all right, let's fear what we don't get - damn those that do.

Violent games, gone. Watch them burn; filth burns well on bonfires. But once we make everything non-violent, we'll inevitably get illicit mods overrunning the net. So we'll ban mod-making, too. Creativity must be constrained for society to be truly free.

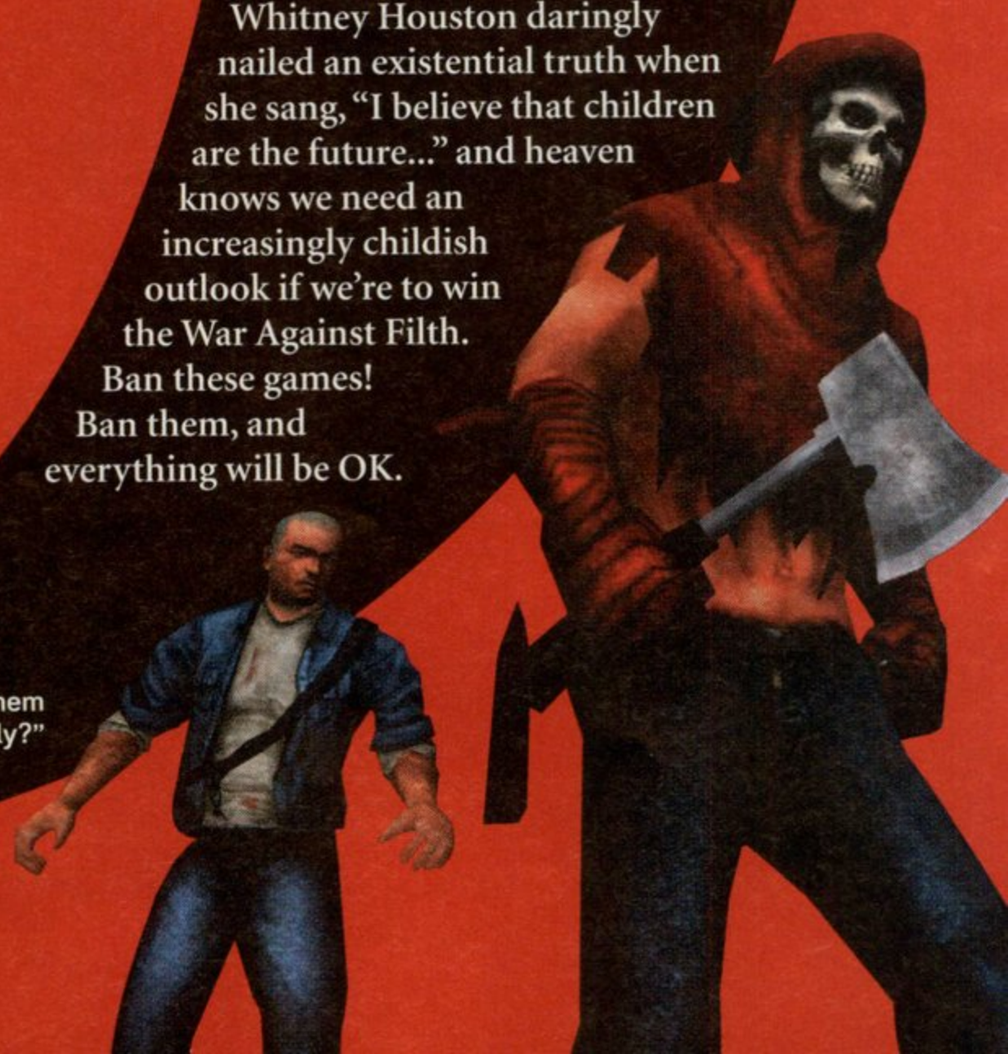
It would be hypocritical to stop at guns. What about psychological violence? The anguish of a *Silent Hill*, the gnawing futility of *Worms*, the plot of just about everything. Conflict! Stories all revolve around conflict, as if that somehow reveals humanity's dirty truths! What next? Victims barricaded in doorless cells to starve? Filth. *The Sims* will be banned too.

Then there are cars. Driving games encourage you to drive fast, recklessly, and there's nothing stopping people playing them drunk. Hey, it's even encouraged – post-pub gaming. And most of the cars are financially unobtainable, so such images actively encourage theft. And the planes! The 9/11 attackers trained on flight sims which let you fly planes near large buildings, such as airports. Are we to stand for this?

There's no evidence that banning things simply results in a powerful, dangerous, criminal black market – look at prohibition in America. That worked well. Catholic priests have saved young boys from sinful acts of indecency, sure. The Ban the Bomb campaign has spelt the end for nuclear weapons. And when Galileo claimed the Earth wasn't the perfect centre of absolutely everything, the Church put him on trial and forced him to shut up: banning ideas and going back to how things were CAN work. The lid of Pandora's Box swings both ways. You just need the vision to crush it shut, with oceanic violence and abyssal intolerance if necessary.

Once we've removed such filth from society, the certification system – previously held by responsible agencies to be a workable safeguard – will no longer be needed. Movies don't really need it anyway, as kiddies obviously don't have access to DVDs, videos and television the way they do games – games are only for babies, after all. All images of conflict will be washed from the eyes of youth. So school readings of Shakespeare's sexually violent filth will go, and the Bible – where a carpenter gets a taste of it from the wood's point of view – will be rewritten with more donkeys and fewer lakes of fire. Prevention. Prevention. Prevention. If we see and hear no evil, it just goes away.

Without violent games, human goodness can flourish as it has historically. Youth can blossom with healthy outdoors pursuits, such as flying with their platoon to Iraq, where their minds will be kept off computerised weaponry and murderous fantasies with discipline and chamber-clearing exercises. Children should not be indoors staring at monitors! They should be out reading council notices about the petition against their skatepark, and getting moved on by police. Whitney Houston daringly nailed an existential truth when she sang, "I believe that children are the future..." and heaven knows we need an increasingly childish outlook if we're to win the War Against Filth. Ban these games! Ban them, and everything will be OK.

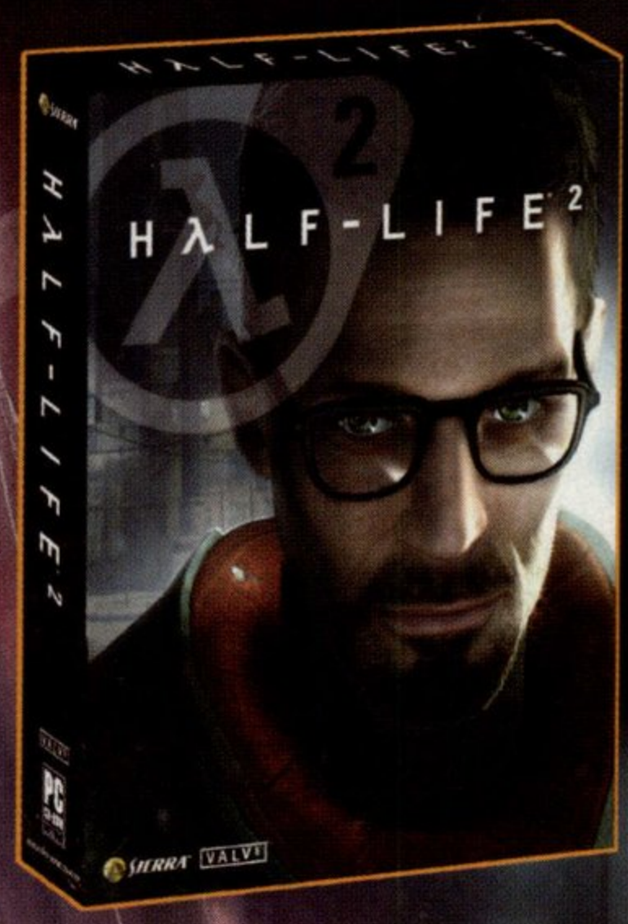


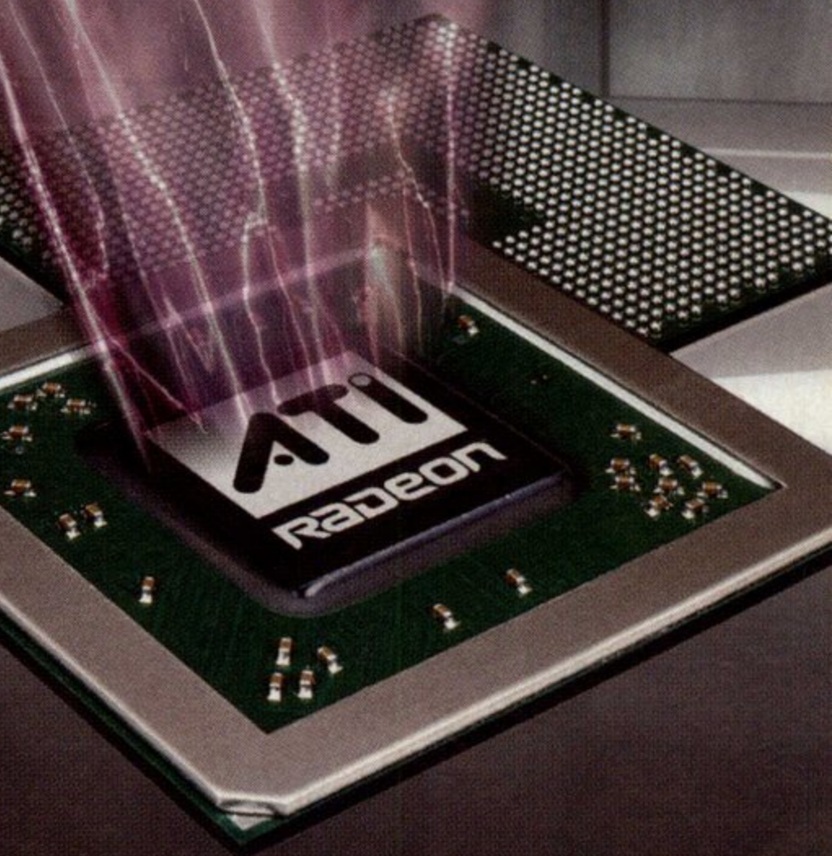
"You been playing them demon videogames lately?"

ATI

RADEON

DESIGNED ON RADEON
BEST ON RADEON





ati.com

Eyewitness Undercover

Illustrations by David Lyttleton

The following is an extract from a forum post by Phil DeLuca, executive producer of **America's Army**. It's his little warning to the cheaters who have started to plague this US Army-endorsed online FPS.

"In the early 1940s, Japan learned an important lesson – 'let the sleeping giant lie.' We may not react swiftly, but when we do it's with unstoppable force. The Army has partners that deal with cyber crime as a matter of course. These include not just various Army IT departments, but also the Department of Justice, the Secret Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigations.

"It's going to get uncomfortable for some of the bad guys, but you know what? They brought it on themselves. Knowing this, anyone who continues to be bad is just plain foolish. Keep trying, though. Sooner or later the bad guy will realise we've known about him for a while... and by then it's too late."

He then goes on to describe how they'll track the crackers down before signing off with: "The Army is angry, and we're coming for you."

It's reassuring to know that despite the ongoing threat of international terrorism, the Army isn't afraid to occupy the valuable and already overstretched resources of its intelligence community in tracking down teenage script-kiddies.

But while The Spy pities his US counterparts, he has scored significant espionage success at Epic who have registered both **Hollow Point** and **Gears of War** as their copyrights, two promisingly brutal-sounding titles.

Other games that caused a whiff under The Spy's nasal cavities this month: is there a **Rise of Nations 2** close to being announced? The Spy says: on a scale of one to in-the-bag it's close to 60% confirmed. **Evil Genius 2** is underway too and Sid has once again donned his strategy-hat to nut out what to do with **Civ 4,** which has fallen into the hands of Take 2.

Evidence of a supersecret RTS being developed by Mithis has also passed under The Spy's magnifying glass: a single screenshot with *Far Cry* style water effects. There are rumours of a multiplayer campaign mode, too. Meanwhile, loose lips at EA have exposed a new game featuring the infernal James Bond – The Spy's only serious rival for this year's 'Mr Kisser' title at the annual Secret Agent Awards. (Location tbc). **From Russia With Love** footage has already revealed a brace of Bonds as Sean Connery flits about on a jetpack (hope there's a secret trailer controversy) while Pierce Brosnan blows up a harbour and escapes in a speedboat. It's reassuringly FPS and the multi-Bond approach sounds intriguing. EA's infernal affairs also let slip there's two new **Sims 2** expansions, although one of those could be the recently released University add-on.

Just time for one last forum post from the world's elite. This time, it's purported to be from Harry Lang, a big Stilton at Viacom. Apart from listing a 2007 release date for the **Star Trek** MMORPG , he also let slip: "While not set in stone yet, discussions are ongoing for several all-new ST games (anybody here like strategy?). And one you might play sooner than you think, if it happens." Spy out.

PSSST! It's...

The Spy

If you're not with The Spy you're against The Spy. And The Spy likes his personal space.

To contact The Spy: defect, and he will contact you.

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Springwood	07 3387 1555	Rockdale	02 9597 3688	Oakleigh	03 9563 3900
Adelaide	08 8231 0622	Liverpool	02 9602 8011	Sunshine	03 9311 3682
ACT	02 6253 1091	Silverwater	02 9748 8322	City(China Town)	03 9654 3888

Product Awards & Honors

But wait there's more...

Great news for those entering the PC Games Addict Reader Awards...

To have the best gaming setup, you'll not only need the best games and a kick-arse PC, but also, the peripherals to go with them.

For that reason, we thought it best to give you the best flightstick from this issue's group test, and one of the better gaming headsets from next month's hardware roundup.

Thanks to the generoisty of our friends at Logitech, this wasn't hard for us to do. So, now the **Logitech Precision PC Gaming Headset** and the **Logitech Force 3D Joystick** join the bundle of goodies destined to go to the winner of last issue's hot comp!

Logitech

LOGITECH PRECISION PC GAMING HEADSET

LOGITECH FORCE 3D JOYSTICK

These great Logitech peripherals join the PCGA readers awards prize bundle:

THE BEST GAMES:

- Pro Evolution Soccer 4
- Sid Meier's Pirates!
- Thief: Deadly Shadows
- Deus Ex: Invisible War
- World of Warcraft
- Rome: Total War
- V8 Supercars 2
- The Sims 2
- Half-Life 2
- Doom 3

THE ALIENWARE PC:

- AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 CPU
- ABit AV8 - VIA K8T800 Pro Motherboard
- ATI Radeon RX800XT 256MB 256-bit DDR3, DVI, VIVO, HDTV, S-Video/Composite - AGP
- Corsair 2GB Dual Channel DDR PC-3200XL Xtra Low Latency (200MHz) - 2 x 1024MB
- Serial ATA RAID 0 - 320GB (160GB x 2) Hitachi Deskstar 7.200RPM w/ 16MB cache
- Sony 16x Dual Layer DVD Recorder
- Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS High Definition 7.1 Surround Firewire (IEEE 1394)
- Alienware Full-Tower case
- Alienware 480W Power

Please Note: Entry to the PC Games Addict Reader Awards is only available via a coupon cut-out from page 24 of PC Games Addict issue 31. Unfortunately, by the time you're reading this, the cut-off date for entering the competition has passed, this is just a surprise bonus for those who entered, not another chance to win. The winner will be announced next issue...

Cossacks II

Napoleonic Wars

April 2005

www.cossacks2.com

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THIS IS HARDCORE

Once upon a time in the genres

Craig 'Squady' Pearson

THIS IS...

FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS

I'm a hunter at heart. I like my games slow, stalky, with just a hint of thyme. So it was with great pleasure that I found myself glued to my mouse and keyboard, stalking my way through a multiplayer demo of *Close Combat: First to Fight* (**www.firsttofight.com**). And owned everyone.

Close Combat's multiplayer is just that: close. No more than eight players in the server, team-based combat and a curtailed selection of weapons. It wears its marine-sim military origins on its sleeve, and tries to ask a little more of its participants.

Think of the military nuances of the *Joint Ops* series, but on a small scale.

Teams split into component parts, four-on-four with a Fire-Team Leader, SAW Gunner, Assistant Gunner and Rifleman. The small scale makes co-ordination a vital aspect, and the Team Leader can lay down orders and on-screen waypoints for the rest to follow. Anyone who's played a game of *Counter-Strike* and watched their so-called team whiz off to the far corners of the map will appreciate what Take Two are trying to achieve.

And partaking of this, I'm afraid to say I did own the rest of the journalists. It's to be expected; I am Hardcore, and they probably read this very column every month and got The Fear. It's a fun game, especially on the LAN where your foes are close by, squirming at every bullet that comes their way. Gloating's a natural by-product, although I regret throwing up the horns.

Craig's team-mates finally turn on him.

Tell Craig where to go Contact him at **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au**

Michelle "Super" Starr

THIS IS...

ONLINE

Now there's a fearsome thought – a thousand hirsute humanoids yelling "Grargh!" a lot and brandishing laser-based weapons. Yup, it's expansion time for *Star Wars Galaxies*, with *Episode III Rage of the Wookiees* (working title. Oh, so working). More than 100 new missions will be available on the Wookiee homeworld Kashyyyk and the Trandoshan slave camps. Players will be able to defend the furry chaps or turn them into Bantha fodder.

What's interesting is that Sony will be distributing it, as with the *EQII* expansion, via download. It seems this is to become the norm for Sony's MMOG packs, and one would think they'd come at a lower price, given that Sony don't have to pay for all that packaging. The $US24.95 tag says otherwise.

Perhaps a more streamlined acquisition process AND paying less money all at once is a bit much to ask for.

"Fancy a quest? That will be $2 please."

Battle of the Behemoths

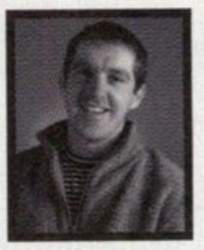
Speaking of *EQII*, it seems Sony are feeling the heat from *WoW*'s subscription base of 800,000, compared to 350,000 on *EQII*. In a bid to cool things down, they're offering players a cornucopia of tasty treats to whet our appetites for Norrath, including promises of unmatched customer service, constant upgrades and a year's free trial of the newbie zone.

A little competition, it seems, is an inspiring thing - *EQII* subscribers now get better bang for buck. Ta much, Blizzzard.

Got questions? Contact Michelle at **michelle@derwenthoward.com.au**

THIS IS...

SIMULATION



Tim 'Golden bales' Stone

Spouse got a brand new combine harvester but won't give you the key? Fret not, there's always the recently updated *SimTractor* (**simtractor.com**), a Gallic garage game that lets you drive all manner of plough pullers, corn collectors, and bale shifters, without the attendant early starts and suicide-inducing loneliness.

Blending practical automotive agriculture with tycoon-type farm management, it's no oilseed rape painting but is well worth checking out if you know your PTO from your 3-point hitch. Features multiplayer co-op harvesting, vehicle damage, and a subgame in which you crawl along bank holiday highways trying to trap as many cars as possible in your dung-spattered wake (tbc).

On a clear day you can see up to 8km.

Red Diesel

Talking of cross-country conveyances, when is some kind, canny publisher going to put *T-72: Balkans In Fire* (**http://t72.iddk.ru**) on retail shelves? This unexpectedly detailed contemporary tank sim currently only available in Russia, has been eliciting glowing praise from Western simmers brave enough to import and wrestle with the Cyrillic. Highlights include terrain deformation, realistic ballistics, cunning AT infantry, and crews who will fight for their lives with sidearms after a bale-out. As usual, there'll be no definitive verdict from us until we've given it a thorough close quarters inspection.

Got armour? Contact Tim at **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au**

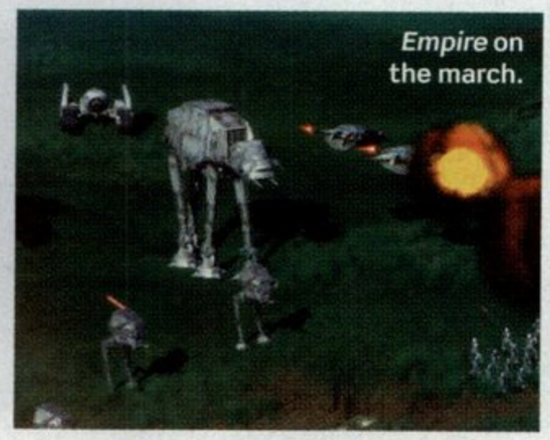
Dan 'The Gaffer' Toose

THIS IS...
STRATEGY/MANAGEMENT

I've literally just emerged from Lucasarts' office with an update on how *Star Wars: Empire at War* is looking. A full preview from first-hand impressions of the game will grace our next issue, but for now we'll kick off the coverage with some snippets of info that will hopefully put some of your minds at ease.

Firstly, Star Wars aficionados who are dying to know what period the game is set in will be pleased to know that you'll be seeing a mix of legacy units from *Episode III*, with the game essentially ending just as the New Hope scenario begins. In other words, the game ends with classic Star Wars flair, which is good news for purists.

Secondly, the game was already running smooth as silk… on a decidedly average machine… for both space battles as well as terrestrial combat. The space battle we saw heaved and chugged a little, but bear in mind the ships dotted the void like stars as they did battle before our eyes, AND the game isn't even fully optimised yet.



As an audio visual experience, this is the RTS Star Wars fans have been looking for. Move along…

Spam the man with the plan
dan@derwenthoward.com.au

THIS IS...
RPG/ADVENTURE

Ross 'Hex Editor' Atherton

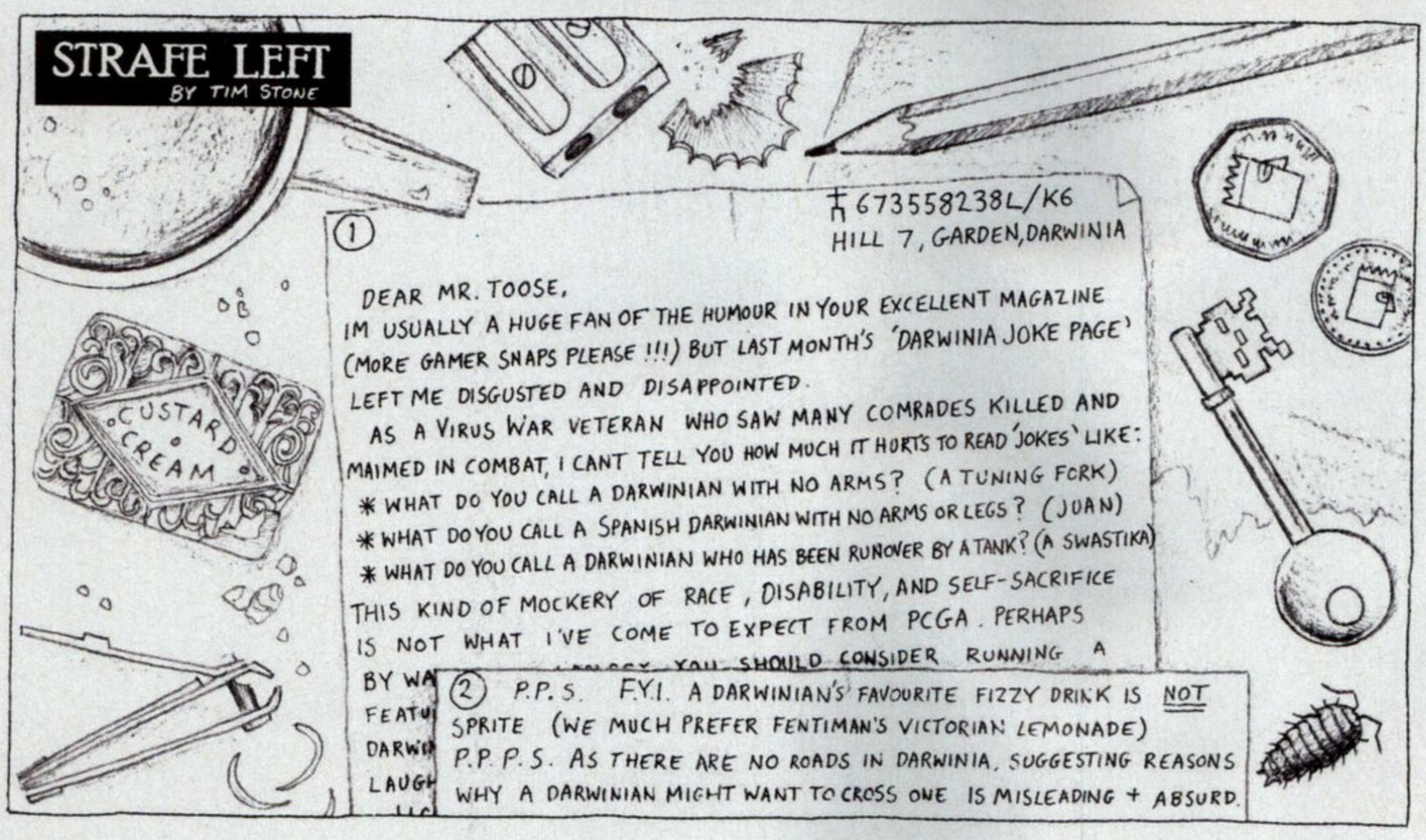
Druids are great. I say this just in case any are reading and are considering putting a hex on me, or whatever it is they do, and not least because they're gathering in Cornwall, not a million miles from PC Games Addict Towers, to which they are probably connected by ley lines. Sinisterly named developers Shadow Tor are working on *Barrow Hill*, an adventure game based on a real-world archaeological dig, using footage and documentation from the dig to help create the game. Currently as mysterious as the ancient standing stones it features, the game has yet to reveal more secrets. We're scared. **www.shadowtorstudios.co.uk**

W, A, S, D&D

Meanwhile, back in the real world of goblins, our chums at Atari have been making happy noises about their licensed D&D titles. Games on the way include *Neverwinter Nights 2* (development continues apace at Obsidian), and *Baldur's Gate 3*. The next few issues should reveal more news.

In the wake of Acclaim's implosion, good old TH 'We'll Try Anything Once' Q have decided to run *The Bard's Tale* up the flagpole and see who'll salute it. We should have a review next month and hopefully a demo too.

Are you an angry druid? Email Ross at
pcga@derwenthoward.com.au


STRAFE LEFT
BY TIM STONE
673558238L/K6
HILL 7, GARDEN, DARWINIA
DEAR MR. TOOSE,
IM USUALLY A HUGE FAN OF THE HUMOUR IN YOUR EXCELLENT MAGAZINE (MORE GAMER SNAPS PLEASE !!!) BUT LAST MONTH'S 'DARWINIA JOKE PAGE' LEFT ME DISGUSTED AND DISAPPOINTED.
AS A VIRUS WAR VETERAN WHO SAW MANY COMRADES KILLED AND MAIMED IN COMBAT, I CANT TELL YOU HOW MUCH IT HURTS TO READ 'JOKES' LIKE:
* WHAT DO YOU CALL A DARWINIAN WITH NO ARMS? (A TUNING FORK)
* WHAT DO YOU CALL A SPANISH DARWINIAN WITH NO ARMS OR LEGS? (JUAN)
* WHAT DO YOU CALL A DARWINIAN WHO HAS BEEN RUNOVER BY A TANK? (A SWASTIKA)
THIS KIND OF MOCKERY OF RACE, DISABILITY, AND SELF-SACRIFICE IS NOT WHAT I'VE COME TO EXPECT FROM PCGA. PERHAPS
BY WA
FEATU
DARWI
LAUGH
SHOULD CONSIDER RUNNING A
(2) P.P.S. F.Y.I. A DARWINIAN'S FAVOURITE FIZZY DRINK IS NOT SPRITE (WE MUCH PREFER FENTIMAN'S VICTORIAN LEMONADE)
P.P.P.S. AS THERE ARE NO ROADS IN DARWINIA, SUGGESTING REASONS WHY A DARWINIAN MIGHT WANT TO CROSS ONE IS MISLEADING + ABSURD.
CUSTARD CREAM

James '20 Cent' Cottee

THIS IS...
ODDBALL

In perhaps the least necessary media cross-over since Michael Jackson's "Moonwalker," a prominent rap star has declared his intent to segue into the video game industry. 50 Cent, Eminem's boy wonder, stars as a gun-toting scallywag off on a delightful mission of vengeance against the New York mob. Cent is confident the game will do well.

"In everything I do, I play to win. I'm out to destroy the competition and my video game is no different. It's a fantasy version of my life. I plan to shake up the videogame world like I did the rap world -- I'm pulling no punches with my game."

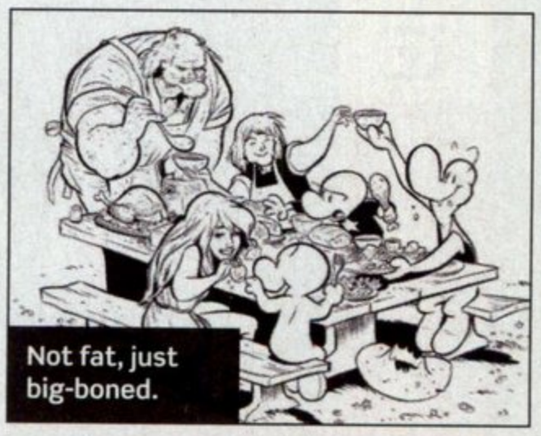
While Mr. Cent's own bullet-riddled past does lend some credibility to the project, for some reason the whole affair just brings to mind that 5 Cent midget from the Virgin Mobile ads. Who knows, maybe we'll be able to unlock him for some helium-fueled bonus levels.

There isn't even word what platforms *50 Cent: Bulletproof* is coming to yet, so maybe we'll get lucky and it'll pass the PC by completely.

In The Doghouse

It seems our little *Sam & Max* piece from last month was needlessly optimistic. Telltale Games has finally announced the big licence the start-up's been working on, and it's Jeff Smith's Bone. Granted, it's still going to be an adventure game based on a cult comic book series that was reasonably big in the 1990s, but will it be salve enough for forlorn adventure fans?

www.boneville.com



Love a good boning? Chat up James at
jcottee@derwenthoward.com.au

STRIKE FORCE WILL PUT A BULLET IN YOUR BRAIN BECAUSE...
›It has three characters with distinct skill-sets›It has new WWII ideas›Multiplayer mixes spies vs snipers vs marines›It'll really, really annoy the purists. Muhahaha!

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

You won't get them. They're part of the Union

The key to special forces is in the unexpected. If they expect a frontal assault, go in the back. If they're expecting tanks, send one man in with a big knife and attitude. So perhaps it's no surprise that while many have expected the next *Commandos* to be a squad-based real-time Strategy, what's coming sneaking onto the release calendar under cover of darkness is... a first-person shooter?

Here's the reasoning. With the first three *Commandos* games Pyro pushed the format as far as it can currently go, so it's time to apply some of its ideas to a whole new genre. At first glance it may appear to be close to *Call of Duty*, but look closer. Fundamentally, it has a different structure, with open levels in which you're left to accomplish your objectives, rather than being pushed through a critical path.

Rather than having one commando, you have three: a spy, a green beret and a sniper, representing infiltration, action and stealth routes through the game. While in some missions you control just one, some call for you to switch between a pair to accomplish your goals. Traditional cheery elements of *Commandos* games reappear, such as a coin to distract some guards. No Whiskey the dog, sadly.

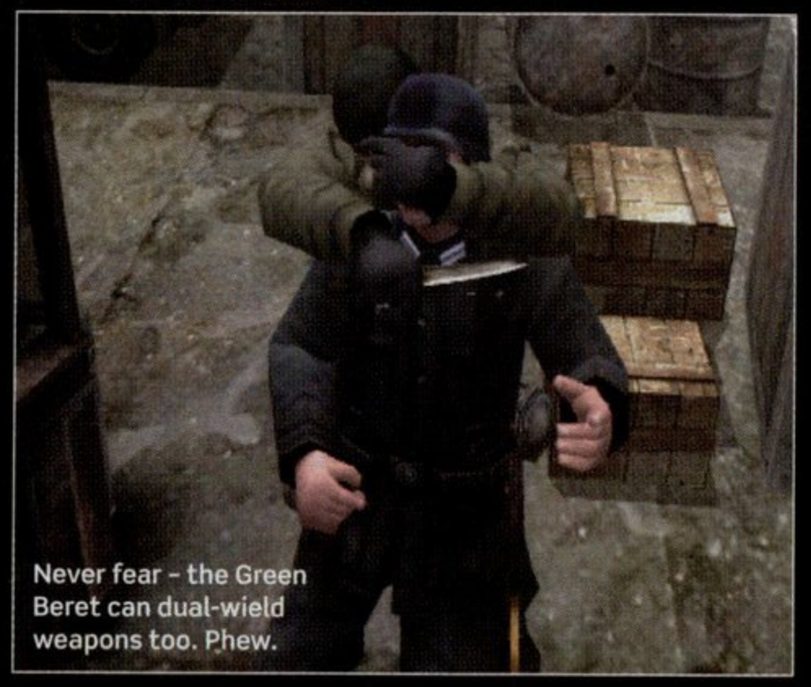
Some *Commandos* fans will be annoyed and the cynical may note that the last time an RTS went first person we had the dubious pleasures of *Command and Conquer: Renegade* to deal with. But this has the potential to confound both.

KIERON GILLEN

README

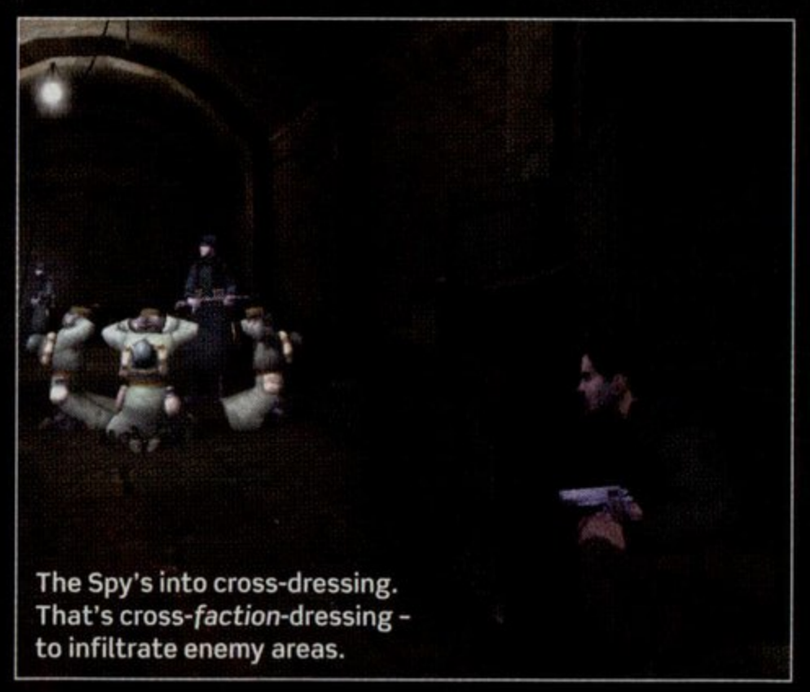
Publisher Eidos
Developer Pyro
ETA Autumn 2005

Scoop!

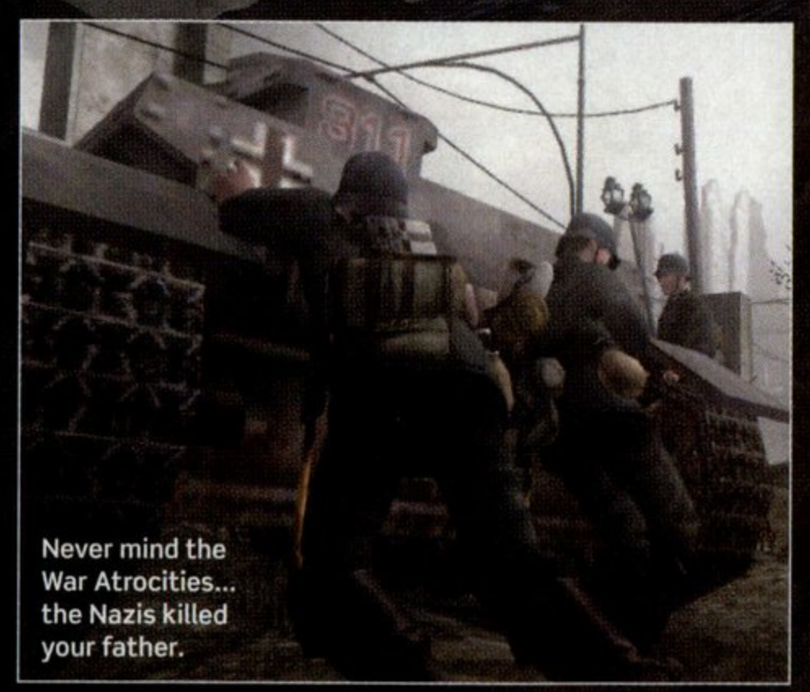


Never fear - the Green Beret can dual-wield weapons too. Phew.

The traditional level of detail in the landscapes is distinctly old-skool.



The Spy's into cross-dressing. That's cross-*faction*-dressing - to infiltrate enemy areas.



Never mind the War Atrocities... the Nazis killed your father.

Swedish defibrillators

RELEASE TBA 2005

Battlefield 2

Swedish developers Digital Illusions used to make pinball games. In fact, they even made some girly games about ponies, but these days they make *war*. Their war started small, with the lost-classic *Codename Eagle*. Then their war got big, very big, with the arrival of vehicular multiplayer masterwork, *Battlefield 1942*. As Swedish exports go, that was one of the most tasteful, and if you're going to stay inside through the chilly winter then it's better to do so making games than making awful disco music. (*Or furniture* - Ed.)

THE PITCH
Parachutes, tanks, men with fine moustaches and all the online carnage you can eat.

Yes, it's cold in Sweden, but not nearly as cold as it is in the icy hearts of your PCGA *Battlefield* correspondents. Naturally, we start with the hard questions, like this one: "Don't you get annoyed with people doing all that stuff like standing on the wings of B-17s? Aren't they just taking the

ON THE DISC More of these mouthwatering *Battlefield 2* trailers > Movies

New characters are lavishly detailed, with all the kit they can use in combat evident to the naked eye.

The new squad spawning system means that helicopters can fill while you're airborne.

Street combat provides plenty of opportunity to practise your reverse parking techniques.

mick?" EA's associate producer on the *Battlefield* games, the ever-convivial Jamil Dawsari, laughs and then leans forward conspiratorially: "No," he says. "We love it. That's just another great *Battlefield* moment."

Dawsari has been talking about lots of *Battlefield* moments, but also about helicopters, which is a popular tactic in winning the favour of grim-faced journalists. "Landing might be problematic," he admits. But then, as we both agree, when you're downing heatseeker missiles with countermeasure flares, and 'suppressing' the opposing forces with epic rocket salvoes, it really doesn't matter. "The challenge for us is to create a vehicle that's user-friendly. It's immediately accessible, but with practice it'll be possible to do things with it that no one else can do." He goes on to demonstrate (using his hands as wings) how the current batch of testers have been able to stand on the underside of a jetfighter as it flies upside down across *Battlefield 2*'s war-torn vistas. It might not be realistic, but damn, it's a whole lot of fun.

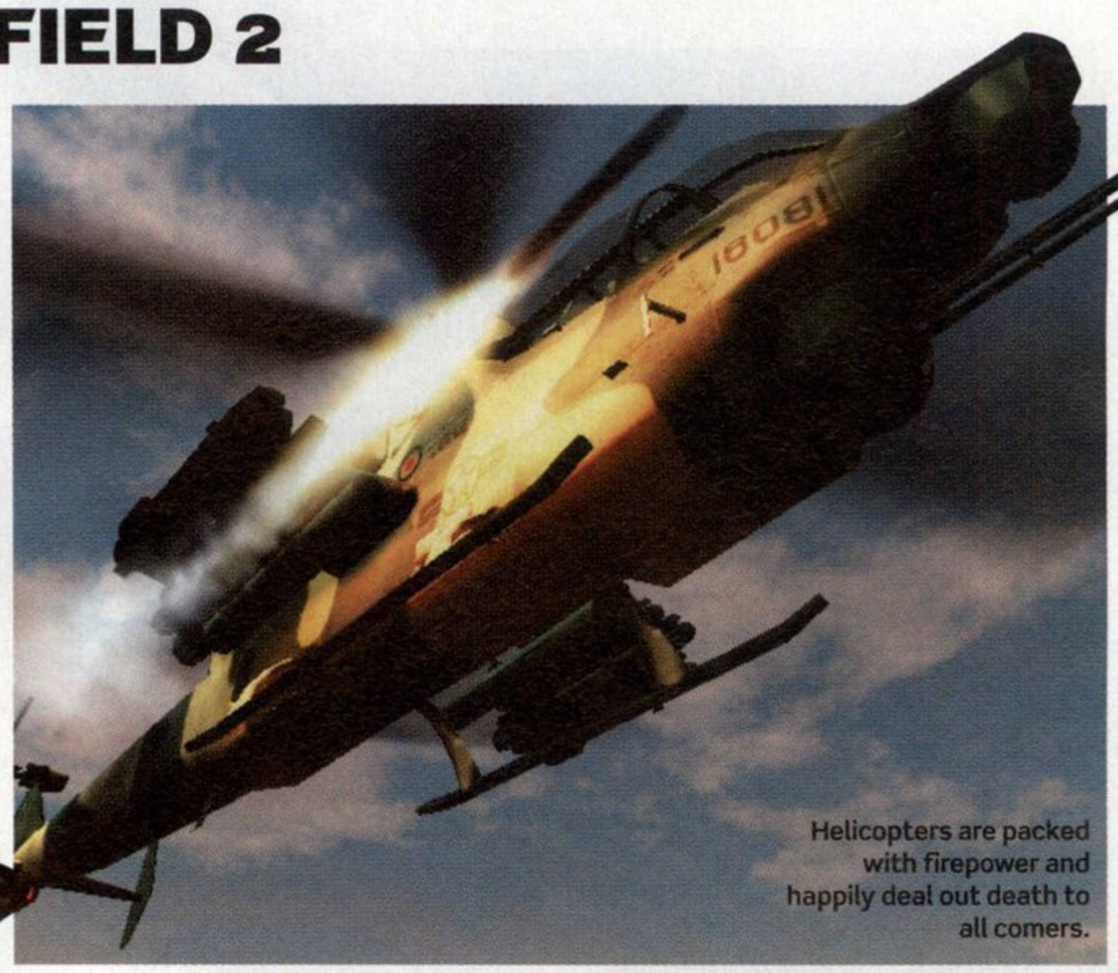
Aside from amusing antics, one of *1942*'s biggest successes was the modification *Desert Combat*, which EA report now accounts for over 30% of all *Battlefield* games played online. In fact, Digital Illusions liked *Desert Combat* so much that they bought the mod team and proceeded to create *Battlefield 2* in the *Desert Combat* image. *BF2* is laden with helicopters, M16s, tanks, moustachioed sergeants and all those toys of contemporary war that made the dusty combat so popular.

But we're still feeling icy-hearted and so we challenge Dawsari about the setting. Isn't modern combat a bit dodgy these days, what with the war and all? ▶

No screenshot can properly convey the brutal impact of the minigun in combat.

BATTLEFIELD 2

It's actually possible to shoot down aircraft with the tank cannon, but you have to be damned good.



Helicopters are packed with firepower and happily deal out death to all comers.

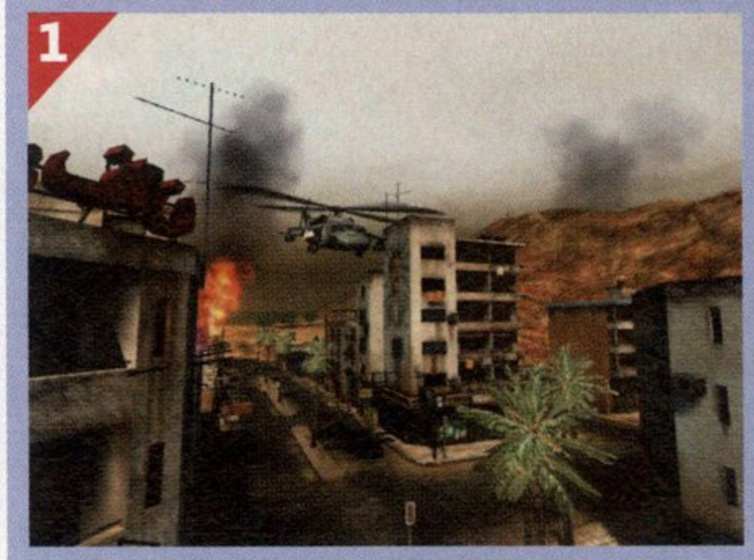
"Absolutely not," he responds. "We've really taken nothing from current circumstances. *Battlefield* doesn't have terrorists versus whoever, it's about a sandbox experience, something that people can just jump in, understand, and play. We just set something up as plausible and go with it." Again, we have to concede that he's right. There's none of the jingoism of forth-coming titles such as *First to Fight*; *BF2* just wants to appeal to the person who thinks tanks are cool and wants to play with them. More than most military games, *Battlefield* has always had a sense of fun, and in *BF2* it's more obvious than ever that Digital Illusions are determined to create a flowing, intuitive and often playful combat game. And it's already leagues ahead of *1942*.

Take, for instance, the squad system. *Battlefield 2* might see up to a hundred people per side in a battle, but some of those people might want a little more cohesion in their play. If this is the case then they can opt to set up or join squads. These smaller units have a leader who can select objectives and issue orders. This allows players to extend the utility of their kit choice to the group as a whole: if a squad-member cries out for ammo, or for a medic, then the relevant icon pops up on the screen of the applicable team-member. The right person will immediately know what they can do to help. This idea of cohesion is taken even further by the way in which players are integrated into their vehicles. If a squad leader is in a vehicle then players can choose to spawn into the vehicle with him even when he is in motion. We tried this out in our hands-on test – finding ourselves gunned down in a ditch we elected to appear ten seconds later on the miniguns of our squad-leader's Blackhawk. No walking miles across broken country for this soldier, we could simply squeeze the trigger and experience the joy of hot lead.

All this makes for a far more fluid combat experience. Sure, you *can* sit out on your own doing the lone wolf sniper thing, but it's far more entertaining to join your friends in an APC and assault a well-defended ridge. What's more, when you're in a vehicle the various characters

HOW TO KILL A MAN IN THREE EASY STEPS

The foes you will face in *Battlefield 2* all have their weaknesses, you just have to find them



1 Helicopters have lots of firepower and can get in really close to deliver it. They're best dealt with using heatseeking missiles and high-speed anti-aircraft guns.

2 Tanks are pretty troublesome and really need another tank to counter them. Engineers can pull a neat trick, though, by laying sticky C4 that rips its guts out.

3 Snipers will be able to use the terrain properly and will be invisible in vegetation, even at long range. The renderer has been tuned to ensure stealth possibilities.

Only strategic buildings will be destructible. These town houses provide excellent cover.

Having air-support makes the job of the tank pilots far easier, especially in cities.

have an area-of-effect, so that injured characters can be healed by medics, ammo-depleted grunts resupplied by support troops and so on. The new kits include C4 packs to take out bridges and other strategic points, and defibrillator kits for the medics to 'resurrect' recently fallen comrades.

Yes, *Battlefield 2* looks good, and sounds *superb*. Terrain detail has been ramped up considerably, and even the arid desert pipeline scenes that we fought over were packed with undergrowth, waist-deep lagoons, twisted trees and shattered old walls. Still more impressive were the sound effects that conveyed the concussive shock of tank shelling, the thunder of artillery fire and the simple, hard smack of handguns and grenades. The system requirements are likely to be pretty high, but a powerful machine will transform *BF2* into a lavish experience.

Yet all these things were small beer when compared to another completely new addition to the *Battlefield* experience, that of the commander role. This completely

Urban areas are filled with incidental detail, creating opportunities for infantry ambushes.

voluntary position can be taken up by anyone on either side of a game. The commander gets a stunning satellite view of the action (as seen in Hollywood thrillers time and again) and he can watch tank battles and infantry action take place in real time. Offering instructions and suggestions for his troops, the commander adds a new dimension to *Battlefield* strategy. Using trees and buildings to hide from a prying eye-in-the-sky will likely become an important tactic in organised *BF2* games. The commander can even use the tactical map to drop supplies, call in artillery or launch flying drones to relay troop positions directly to his infantry.

Conveys the concussive shock of tank shells

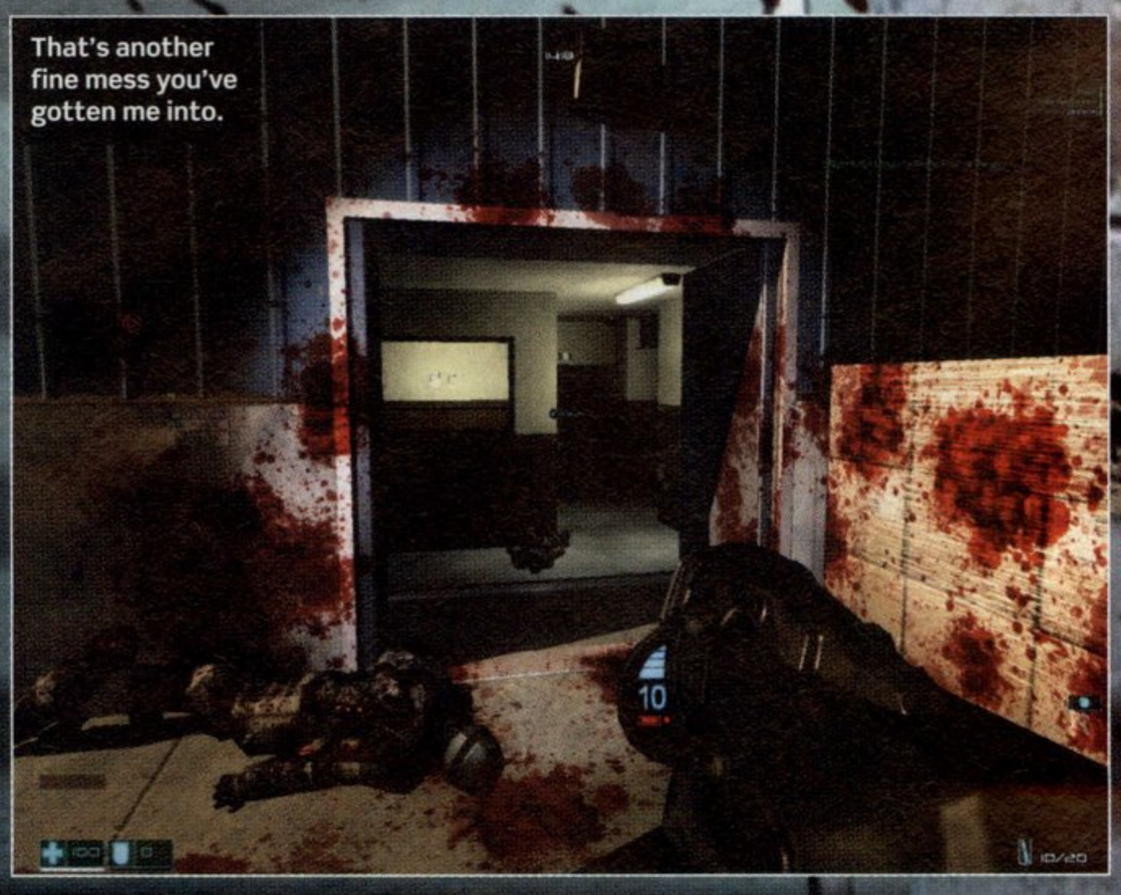
This new commander interface is part of a concerted effort by Digital Illusions to make *BF2* even more appealing to organised teams, but also to modders. "The mod community is a lever into a wider audience," says Dawsari, as he enthuses over the commander-view and its supporting development tools. "You know, what I'm excited about is what people will make of it in space combat mods, Warhammer mods, whatever." And he's right to be excited, because from whatever angle you approach *Battlefield 2*, as a mod-maker, a clan tactician or just a casual player, it looks stunning. We left the Stockholm offices with heart warmed and an alarming urge to break in through a window and play some more. *Battlefield* wasn't just a one-hit wonder. Dice's online gaming phenomenon is going to be back and it's going to be *beautiful*.

JIM ROSSIGNOL

README

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Digital Illusions
Link www.eagames.com
Modern weapons, great graphics, and a sense of fun? We have high hopes for *BF2*.

Did someone just turn up the heating?



That's another fine mess you've gotten me into.

At least let the builders finish before you shoot them.

Kicking ghosts slowly in the face

F.E.A.R.

RELEASE JUNE

Gold rain? Climate change is worse than I thought.

THE PITCH
Vibrant Woo-like, in-the-face shooting matched with sombre, menacing Japanese horror.

While we yearned for *Half-Life 2*'s 'So Real They're Ordinary!™' physics, Monolith slaved. Toiled. Occasionally, showered. And unlike *HL2*, *F.E.A.R.*'s Havok physics are a consequence of your actions rather than the reason for them; Monolith prefers to stuff its shooter with great chunks of outrageous action that overwhelm nearly all else. Too much? We have to know. Square-jawed, we speed to Paris on an underwater train and are soon in the code dungeons beneath the Champs Elysee, a family of witless asylum seekers clinging to our legs. "Rapidement!" shouts the tête-programmer to the cracking of his whip, "remplissez-le de votre magie!" They're really going for it.

F.E.A.R. looks tres bon. Despite the name, this game's all about the shooting-in-the-face, gunfights so wild they make The Matrix look five hours too long. *F.E.A.R.* also borrows Keanu Reeves' famous 'bullet time' acting effect, and makes it work in a way that bypasses cynicism extremely well. For a start, it's actually necessary, as at times enemies are either so numerous or so hard to see – or both – that ignoring it kills you quicker than the state of Texas. And for a stop, the effect looks and sounds fantastic, slowing both the absurdly rich particle effects and booming sound to a gelatinous, reverberating rumble. How can your character do this? Is it paranormal? Monolith refuse to say, and we like it that way.

Turns out guns *do* kill people (who knew?) and they feel very chunkily effective here, but death's scythe is broader than that. Yet what are 'context-driven' melee attacks? Hound-like, we make *F.E.A.R.*'s lead designer explain. "Context-driven just means attacks are influenced by whether you're standing, running, jumping or crouching," says Craig Hubbard, sitting on an immigrant, "plus whether you're aiming at an enemy's face or legs... We've tried to set it so it's easy and gratifying to use, but we don't force you to rely on it. Also, because it's harder to jump-kick than to shoot, we deliberately made it extremely powerful."

> Turns out guns *do* kill people (who knew?)

But of course, fear... we haven't mentioned it. Tsk. The early scenes we played through were certainly atmospheric, aided by fantastic sound and the gently mangled psychology of Japanese horror films. "Our goal isn't so much to get in your face as it is to get under your skin," says Craig, somewhat grossly. "With horror, you can play to the senses or you can go for the psyche. One is thrilling while it lasts, like a rollercoaster; the other stays with you for days or even years." So instead of future-worlds and monsters we get a now-ish city populated by ordinary people. F.E.A.R. (First Assault And Recon) is sent into a terrorist situation gone wrong, expecting a straight if violent fight. But things get weird. Lights go out, strange figures appear. You find pools of blood you could drown in. Subtlety, slight wrongness and a whisper of malice can do wonders (as with *Half-Life*'s G-Man), but there's gore here too – vats of it.

Creepy? Yes. Horrifying? Let's split up and explore that one.

Certainly, there's no fear in the multiplayer, which abandons horror for more standard, if gorgeous, team and solo snuffing. It does retain the time dilation feature, however, via witchcraft. It's all lovely but not the reason for desiring this like that babysitter you had when you were seven. That reason is the singleplayer: furiously sexy action bound to a steely storyline, a subject about which Monolith are... monolithic. "The more you leave to the imagination, the deeper you'll cut, so to speak." So speaks Craig. "It's a lot easier to make somebody jump than it is to emotionally scar them for life. But we're always up for a challenge."

STEVE WILLIAMS

README

Publisher Vivendi
Developer Monolith
Link www.vugames.com
Already atmospheric and crazy-fun, but it could struggle to stay scary throughout.

A peasant in the hand is worth two in the high-polygon bush.

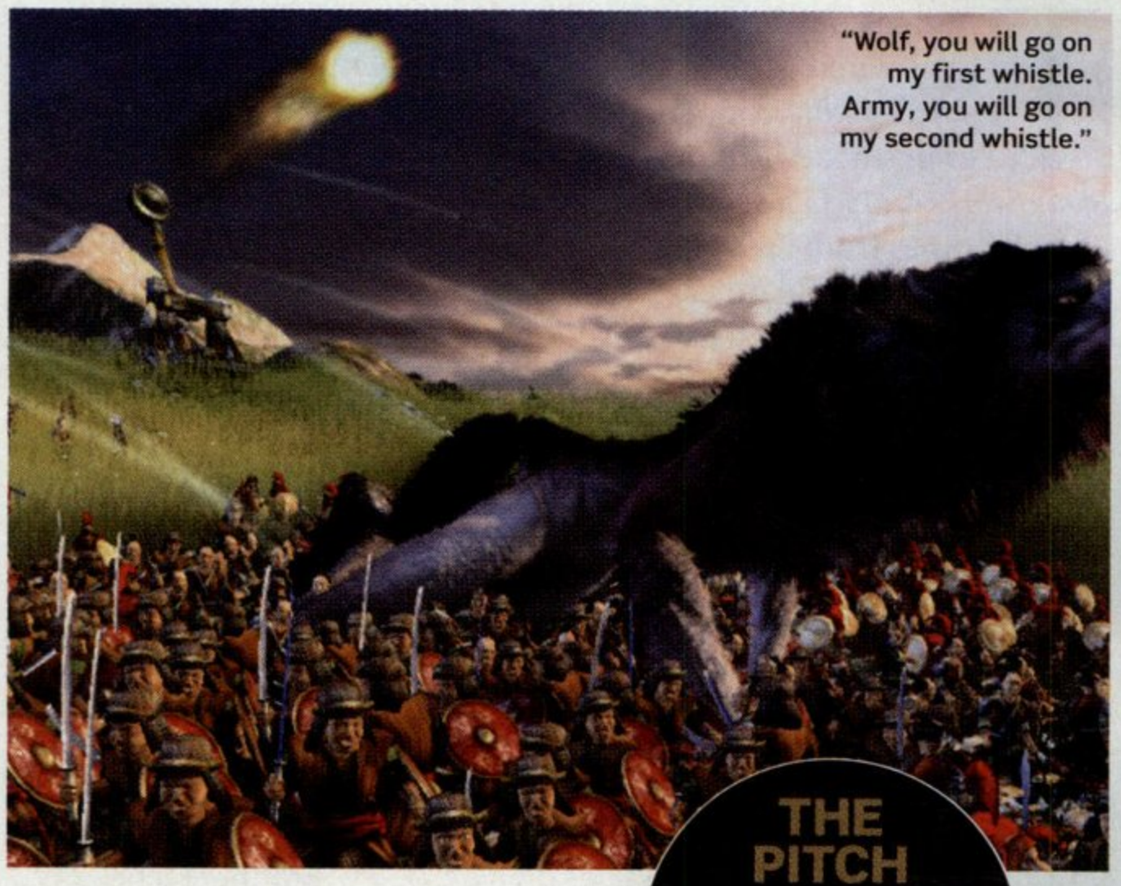
Where do you want your Christmas tree?

Landscapes are ludicriously detailed, right down to these gorgeous pagodas.

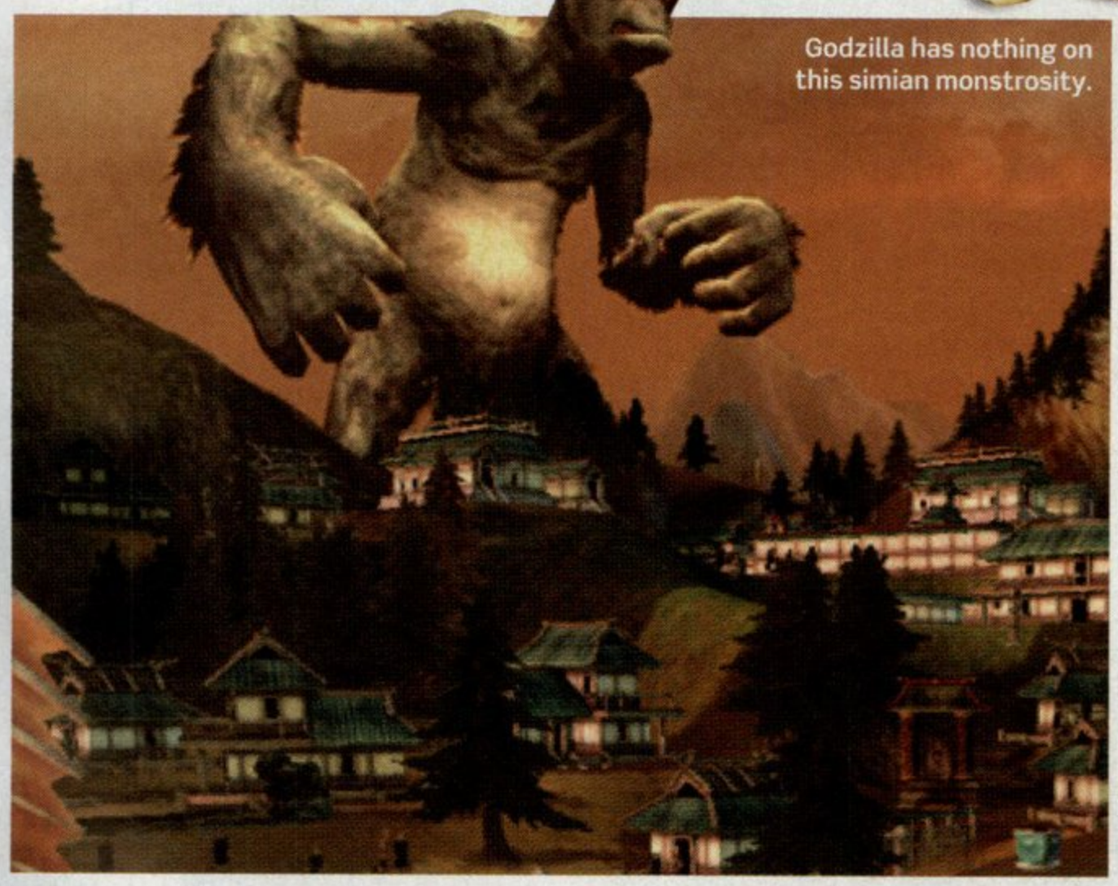
Introducing shades of grey

RELEASE OCT-DEC

Black & White 2



"Wolf, you will go on my first whistle. Army, you will go on my second whistle."



Godzilla has nothing on this simian monstrosity.

THE PITCH
Have a hand in the destiny of a magical civilisation. A tactile, beautiful god game.

If the game gig falls through, they could always form a band. Mammals on Tour.

Peter Molyneux slams a foot-tall pile of densely typed design documents in front of us. The sheer weight of paper brings to mind less *Black & White*, and more War and Peace. An apt parallel, given the game of dual moralities Molyneux and designer Ron Miller are trying to create. Good players build and nurture, bad players destroy. One is a god of peace. One is a god of war. Half city building, half RTS.

You're asked to manage (not necessarily care for) a civilisation, in a reactive, physical world. "For me," says Molyneaux, "it's all about personal cruelty, about being individually cruel to people. Where the first game failed in my opinion is me not thinking, 'I don't like that, over there. I'm going to *totally* (*Ahem* – Ed) it.'" Molyneaux, then, enjoys the War option – taking an aggressive route to total domination.

This option means raising an army from your civilians, then marching them to war, using military might and cunning tactics to achieve victory. Your in-game creature, 200 feet and twenty tonnes of dastardly AI, is your ultimate unit, backed up by all the men you can find. By dragging a formation's banner onto the creature, they'll then follow his moves.

Ron, meanwhile, is laying out his ideal city. This is the peaceful route, taking inspiration from city management games such as *Caesar*. You're working to create a marvellous civilisation, attracting residents from across the land. Ron draws out plans for great defensive walls, and literally drags them to sufficient height. "I want to protect us from the outside," he says, distractedly drawing out great curves. "Walls are important because they protect your people – the more protected your people feel, the more they'll breed. They can be ridiculously high, but they obviously take a lot of resources. You can put anything you like on your wall, archers, maybe even catapults. You make your own defences. You could place walls in ever decreasing steps, and have these huge Minas Tirith-like defences." Roads come next, great curves and avenues, each painted onto the scenery. Buildings are placed. The finishing touch: with a wave of the hand the swaying grass is seeded with beautiful flowers.

> "For me, it's all about personal cruelty"

ON THE DISC What's in full colour, and yet *Black & White 2*? The answer is in > Galleries

This is all just cannon fodder for Molyneux. First, he scatters men and women across the fields with a simple flick of the wrist. Then he hurls rocks at the walls, knocking off the archers sitting atop, bashing great holes for an invading army. But that's just showboating – real destruction is about to be unleashed. The remaining peasants are co-opted into constructing a great spire, towering over the city. They're building a miracle: a volcano.

Peter unleashes it on an opposing town. It breaks straight out of the ground, scattering innocents left and right. Fireballs rain down, followed by great lava streams. It's a great technological demonstration: the molten rock flows across the terrain, setting fire to everything in its path.

The first *B&W* lacked focus and structure. This is different: there are win conditions, objectives, just like any other RTS. But we'll reserve our judgement for now. Molyneux and Miller both have chapters left to write.

TIM EDWARDS

README

Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Lionhead
Link www.bwgame.com
It's gorgeous, it's interactive, and most importantly, there's a game in there.

Don't shun this one

Pariah

RELEASE MAY

THE PITCH
Solid shootery fun, spectacular weapons, speedy vehicles and even a plot. Feverish.

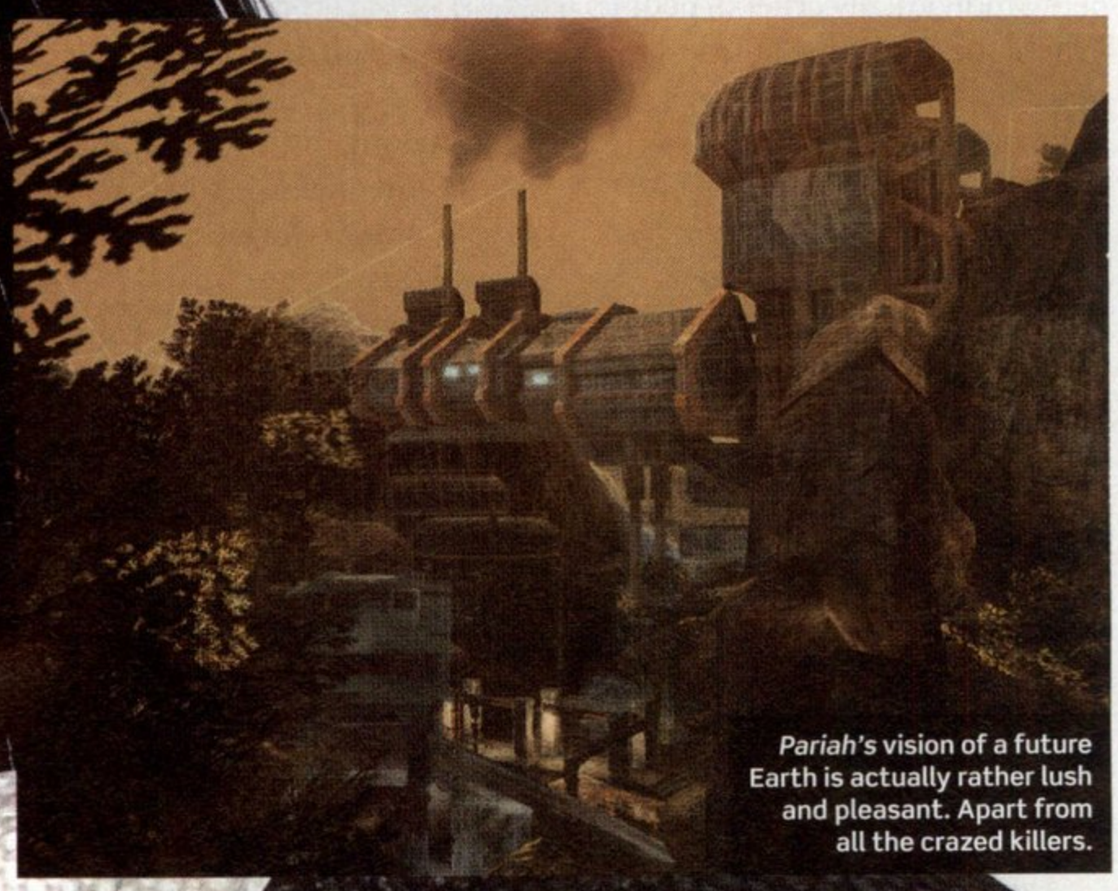
This may be the most ill-considered game title since *Soldner*, or perhaps even since *Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura*. 'Pariah' comes from an Indian dialect word meaning outcast or untouchable – the lowest caste of a highly tiered society. I'm looking forward to the sequel already: *Pariah 2: I'm a Great Big Bogan, Shun Me.*

But there's method to Digital Extremes' madness. Where most shooters pitch you as a hero, *Pariah* really makes you an outcast, hunted because of the lethal virus you carry. Not merely shunned, but targeted for elimination. Crash-landing on Earth (in this twisted far-future, our planet is a penal colony), you're immediately introduced to one of *Pariah*'s innovations. Badly injured from the crash, you must use your doctorly skills and a handy injection device to heal. Throughout the game, when you use this you'll spend several seconds defenceless – and will be subsequently giddy and disoriented for a short while. It remains to be seen whether this will ramp up the tension or just be plain annoying.

Two at the front, and one in the back

For the most part, though, *Pariah* closely resembles the *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament* games which Digital Extremes have previously co-developed. Lush, colourful worlds with a definite chunkiness of design are the backdrop to the kind of first-person shooting we know and love. Like *Far Cry*, most of the action takes place in the great outdoors, but there'll be interior missions too, making a good contrast of harsh metallic corridors and rolling hills, rivers, deserts and forests.

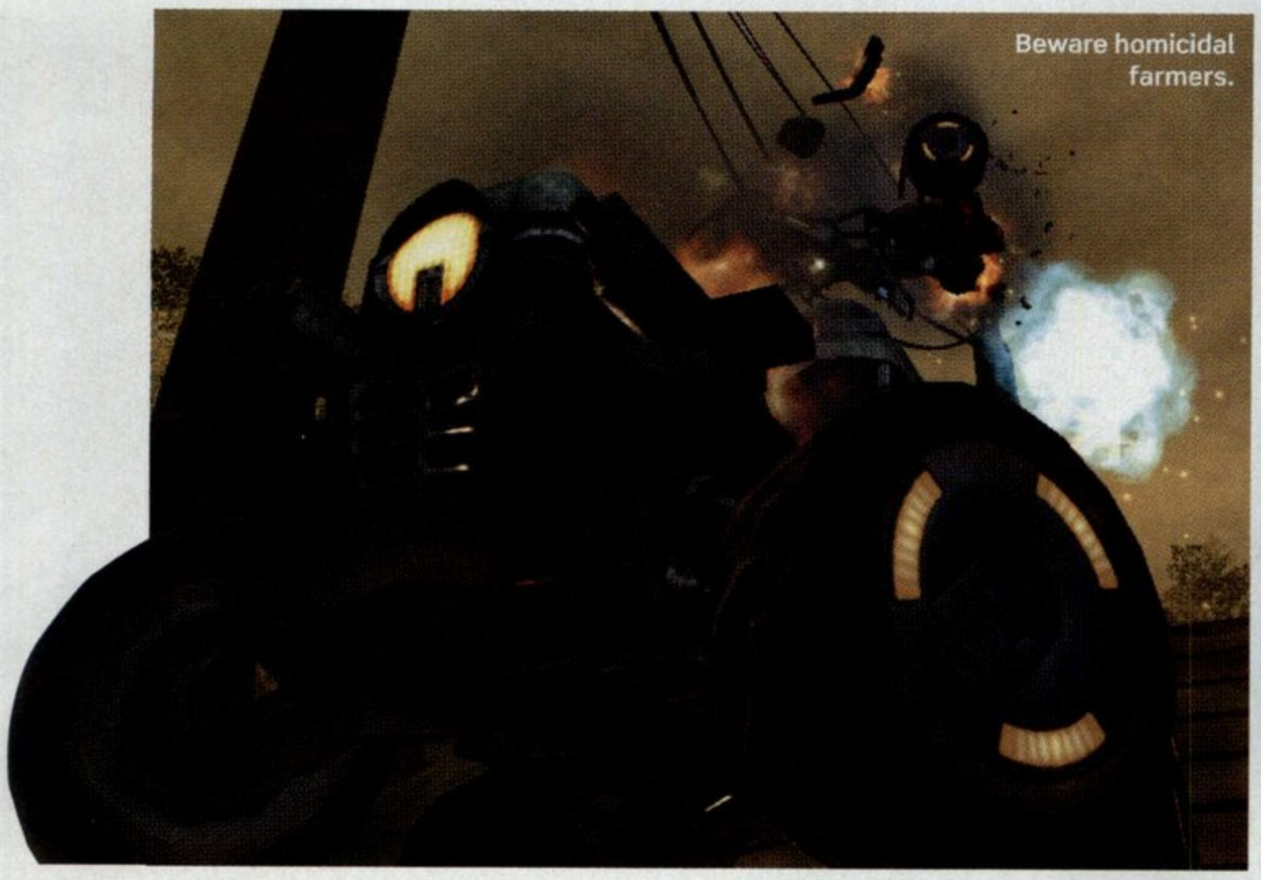
Perhaps emboldened by the success of *UT 2004*'s vehicular action, *Pariah* features four machines (that we know of) to aid your progress and offer even more weaponry when yomping about in the countryside. The Wasp is a one-man, three-wheeled device (two at the front and one at the back – this is the future, after all) equipped with a pair of machineguns. For the discerning gent whose young lady might also be along for the ride, the Bogie is a more conventional



Pariah's vision of a future Earth is actually rather lush and pleasant. Apart from all the crazed killers.

BEAUTIFUL DISEASE

Karina has a problem. Not only is she cursed with classical good looks, she's also infected with the virus at the core of the plot. It seems that prisoners have been deliberately infected with this lethal virus by a shady corporation, but for some reason Karina just refuses to die. That's little comfort to your character, though, who becomes infected himself and must find a cure. In the meantime, Karina's kind enough to stick around and give you a hand, even co-piloting vehicles. Other AI-controlled people will fight alongside you at times, but none quite have Karina's appeal.



Weapons can be modified with items dropped by enemies.

two-passenger beast with machineguns and a rocket-launcher turret – think *Halo*'s Warthog and you won't be too far off. For high-speed, one-man, hover-transport opt for the Dart, while our sources also speak of a heavyweight transport vehicle called the Dozer.

Hand-held weaponry, though, is often a make-or-break issue for an FPS. The basics seem solid enough: machineguns, sniper rifle, grenade launcher and, of course, your healing tool. But Digital Extremes have added a neat customisation system. Instead of choosing outright character classes, the way in which you upgrade your weapons gives you the chance to specialise. Fallen enemies drop multi-purpose Weapon Energy Cores which can be collected and 'spent' on the weapon of your choice.

So, in a way reminiscent of *Deus Ex*, you can focus your energies on gaining maximum results from your sniper rifle (on which upgrades result in better targeting), or closer-range weapons like an assault rifle. Our favourite has to be a grenade type that, as it flies towards its luckless target, attracts scrap metal from the ground, resulting in even more damage as the cluster-bomb fragments explosively. Nasty.

There is a theory that you can't make one game equally good in both single and multiplayer. But that isn't stopping Digital Extremes from trying, for although *Pariah*'s story is reasonably well fleshed out, it's being furiously balanced for multiplayer too. Going head to head with other players affects a few significant parameters: most fundamentally, you'll only have two weapons in multiplayer, picked before the scrap, so choose wisely. The system of upgrading via Weapon Energy Cores remains (fragged players drop WECs), but in multiplayer you'll notice how slow a process the upgrade system is. Will this, along with the vulnerability of using the healing system, result in high levels of lurking? We suspect so, but we also suspect there's enough time to balance such issues out for the finished product.

In the future, trikes will have a pair of wheels at the front. Billy Connolly will be furious.

One thing's for sure. The game itself won't be any worse than the name.

ROSS ATHERTON

README

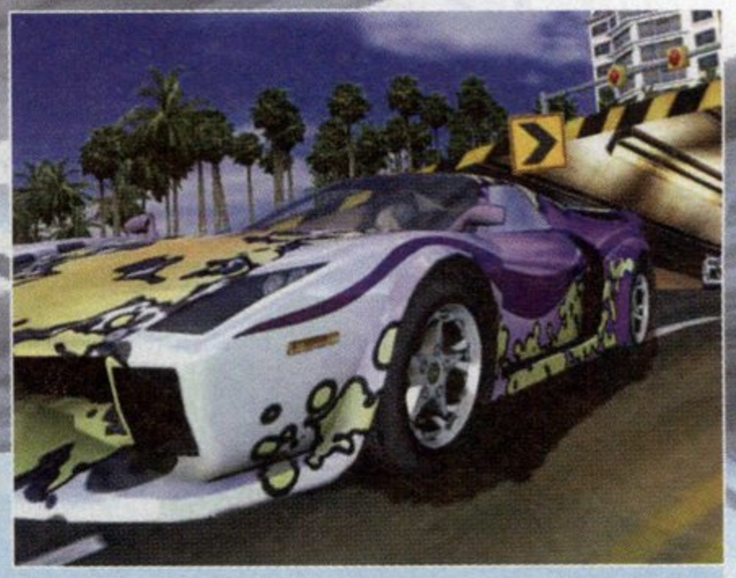
Publisher Hip Interactive
Developer Digital Extremes
Link www.pariahgame.com
The *UT* team tread further into safe ground. Satisfying, explosive action is a safe bet.

DOCTOR, DOCTOR

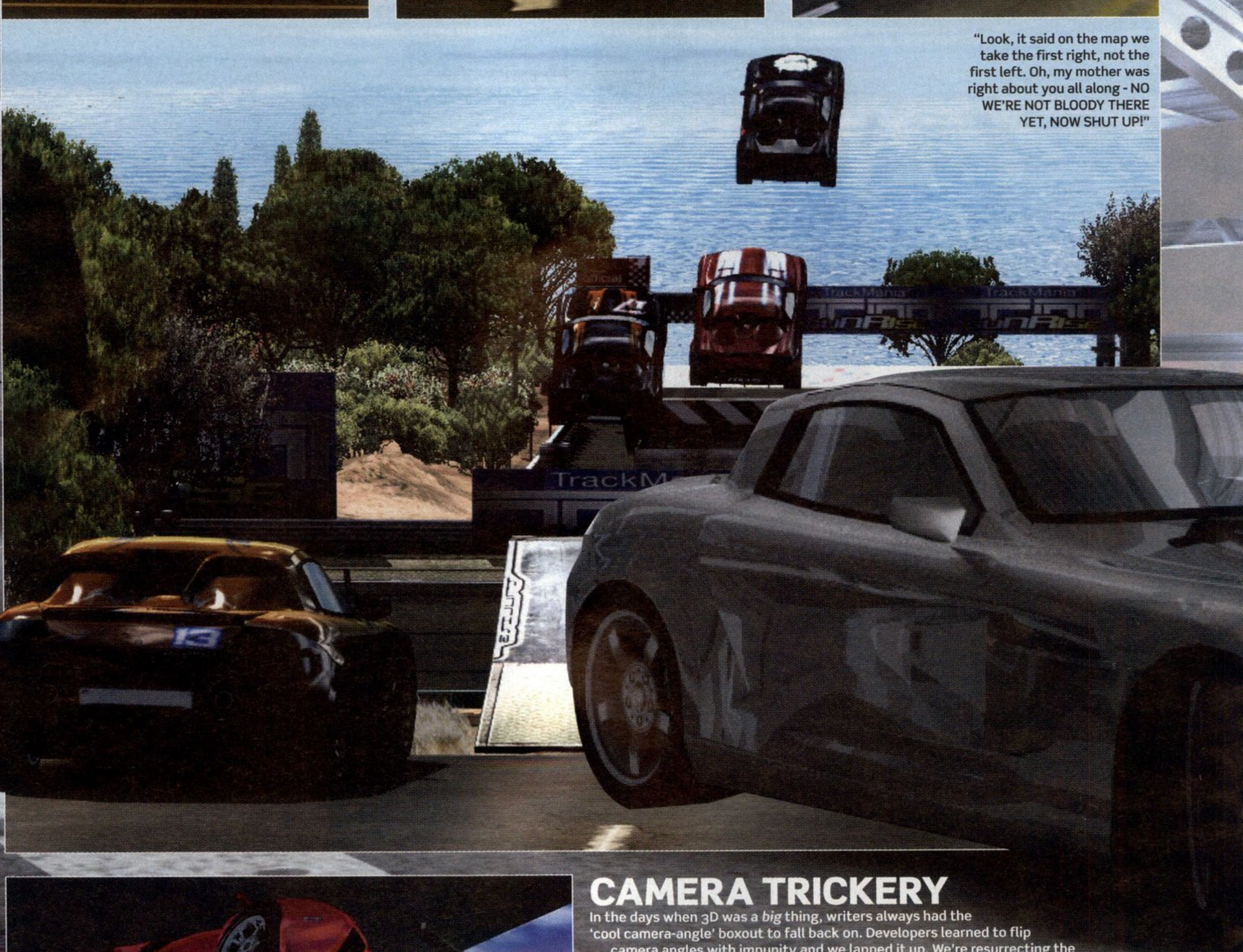
Tsk – doctors are getting younger all the time. You play this fresh-faced fellow: Jack Mason, a disgraced and world-weary medic tasked with escorting the virus-infected Karina across the prison planet of Earth. When their craft is apparently shot down, the good doctor is dragged into a cycle of disease, enormous violence and impending disaster. Meanwhile, the authorities try to contain the biological outbreak you now partly represent with a vast explosion. Is that reasonable use of force? As plots go, it's aiming to out-Hollywood Hollywood; how will shooter specialists Digital Extremes handle the drama? Explosively, we predict.

It's the multi-racial car rally. Black, white and red celebrate diversity.

Mr Ferarri could hardly contain his joy at the news: twins!



"Look, it said on the map we take the first right, not the first left. Oh, my mother was right about you all along - NO WE'RE NOT BLOODY THERE YET, NOW SHUT UP!"



Look! It's all 3D and stuff. Must. Tell. Everyone.

CAMERA TRICKERY

In the days when 3D was a *big* thing, writers always had the 'cool camera-angle' boxout to fall back on. Developers learned to flip camera angles with impunity and we lapped it up. We're resurrecting the tradition here, because Nadeo have worked alternative camera magic into the game. This time around, they've added camera controls to the map maker. At certain trigger points, custom track makers can add camera flips, pans and effects. Instead of following the car, you might get a shot panning across the front, or from the wheel hub. The disorientating colour effects are particularly off-putting and perfect for sadistic map-makers.

Over sexed, over paid and over steer

Trackmania Sunrise

REVIEW NEXT ISSUE

My car just scraped over the finishing line. Scrape. Ten minutes that Time Trial took. Ten minutes of shaving seconds, cutting corners and forcing my car through gaps where cars shouldn't fit. The best bit: my car *literally* just scraped over the finishing line. Near the end, I flipped over and covered the last few metres on my side, flopping onto the roof just over the finishing line. *Sunrise* doesn't care *how* you do it, as long as you do it.

THE PITCH
Seatbelts are required for this racing game where you spend more time in the air than on the track.

The disparate components really shouldn't click: it's a racing game with puzzle and platform modes. It's not serious. It's been pared down to the essentials: forward, reverse, left, right. No gears, no handbrake, no worries. It's the very lack of focus on the cars that makes *Trackmania* unique: the spotlight is on the tracks, whether torturously twisted platform layouts with massive loops and jumps, or a straight race against the clock.

Platform mode plays like a *Tony Hawk's* game, the tracks a mixture of power boosters, huge ramps and loops. The challenge is to finish without restarting too many times, while using the ramps to pull off tricks.

Race mode has subtler, but no less twisted, tracks. They're designed to throw you out of control at almost every bend, and coupled with the driving model, this happens a lot. To corner in *Sunrise* is to grapple the forces of gravity and friction. In pudding. A small bump will wrest the car from the road, flipping it through every axis possible before slamming it back down on the track.

These two modes now take precedence over puzzle mode, where you slot track together for yourself. It was this component that made the original game so different to the masses of other racers. Since then, Nadeo have taken community feedback onboard to refine it.

> To corner is to grapple the forces of gravity

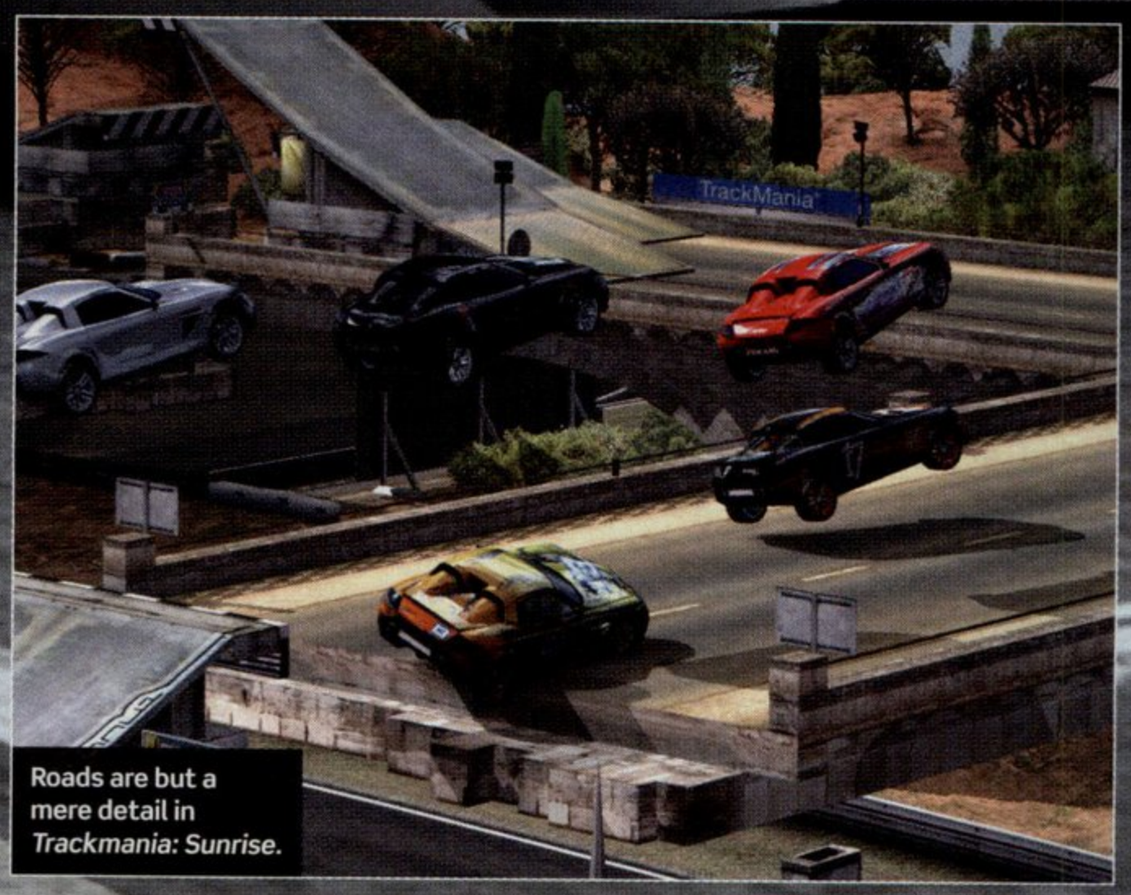
Creating a new genre has its difficulties – there's no one to pitch it to. I can't see the hardcore racing sim fans getting behind *Trackmania*'s wheel with any great enthusiasm. But then, it's the fact that it's *not* pitched to racing fans that makes this game interesting. There's a glint in *Trackmania*'s windscreen. Glorious colours abound, it can be picked up and toyed with for minutes or hours, something that can't be said for most driving games, they tend to steer one way or another on PC.

True, we're still a little concerned with the obtuse camera angles and the little help you get when trying to work out the routes. And, it's not a game for people who dislike replaying areas over and over. Just the same, this could yet be a brand new dawn for *Trackmania*.

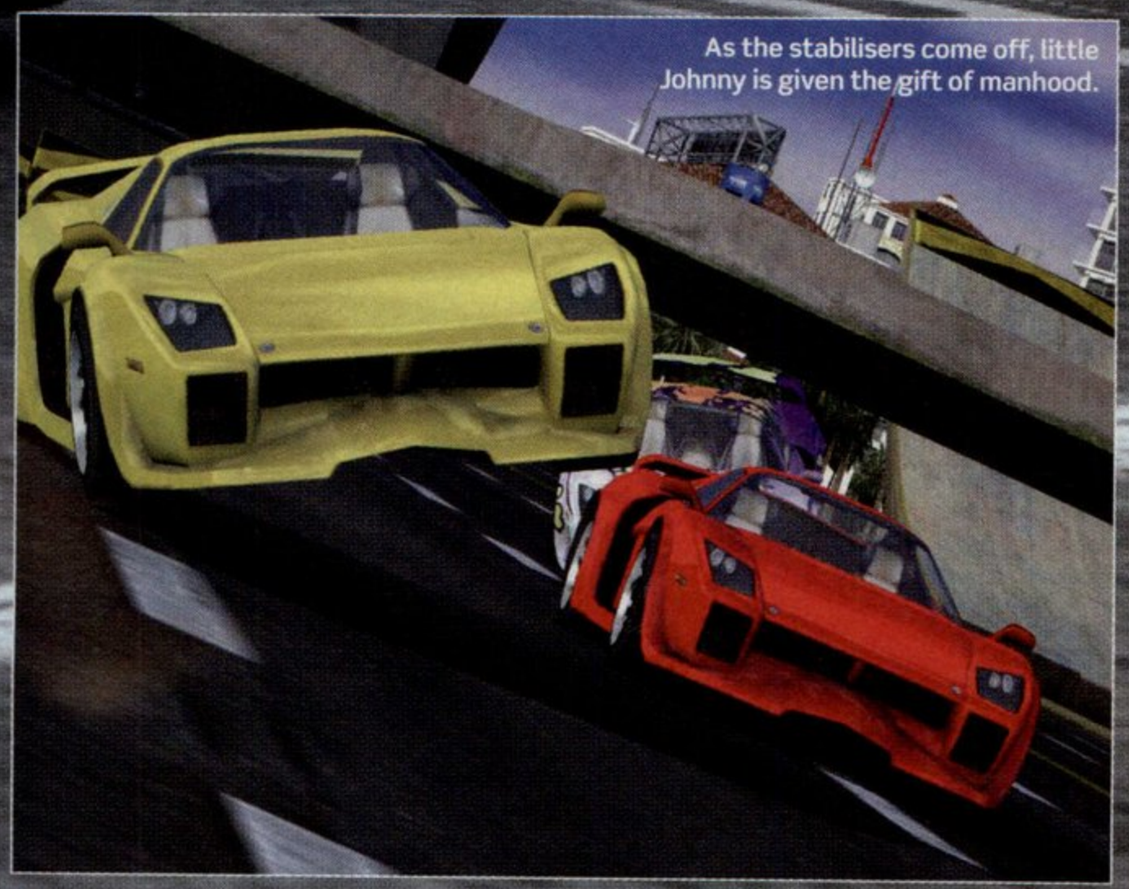
CRAIG PEARSON

README

Publisher Digital Jesters
Developer Nadeo
Link www.trackmainiagame.com
Sex, tracks, rock and roll. Well, maybe not sex, but it does look damn pretty.



Roads are but a mere detail in *Trackmania: Sunrise.*


As the stabilisers come off, little Johnny is given the gift of manhood.

A spineless sequel?

Worms 4 Mayhem

RELEASE MAY

They almost said it, but not quite. 'Forget *Worms Forts*,' seemed to be the unspoken subtext of Team 17's presentation. 'It was a mistake – a bit like *Worms Blast*. Let's put it behind us, and we can go back to what made *Worms* so great. And look: the fat kid explodes.'

THE PITCH
Worms goes back to basics: carnage, evil tittering, and some very bizarre weapons.

Brought low by the Inflatable Pommie

For reasons that just don't seem important any more, small teams of worms have access to a variety of comedy weapons. Within the confines of a cartoon world, they must defeat the opposing team either through direct damage or by whacking enemy worms into water.

After ten years animating the pink, squeaky-voiced maniacs, Team 17 are more clear than ever about what makes their game successful. Gone is *Worms Forts*' distracting construction; reduced are the expanses of water.

What remains is a pure and personal brand of wanton destruction. To see your favourite wriggler brought low by the Inflatable Pommie, a sentry gun or a simple bazooka is to need instant comedy revenge.

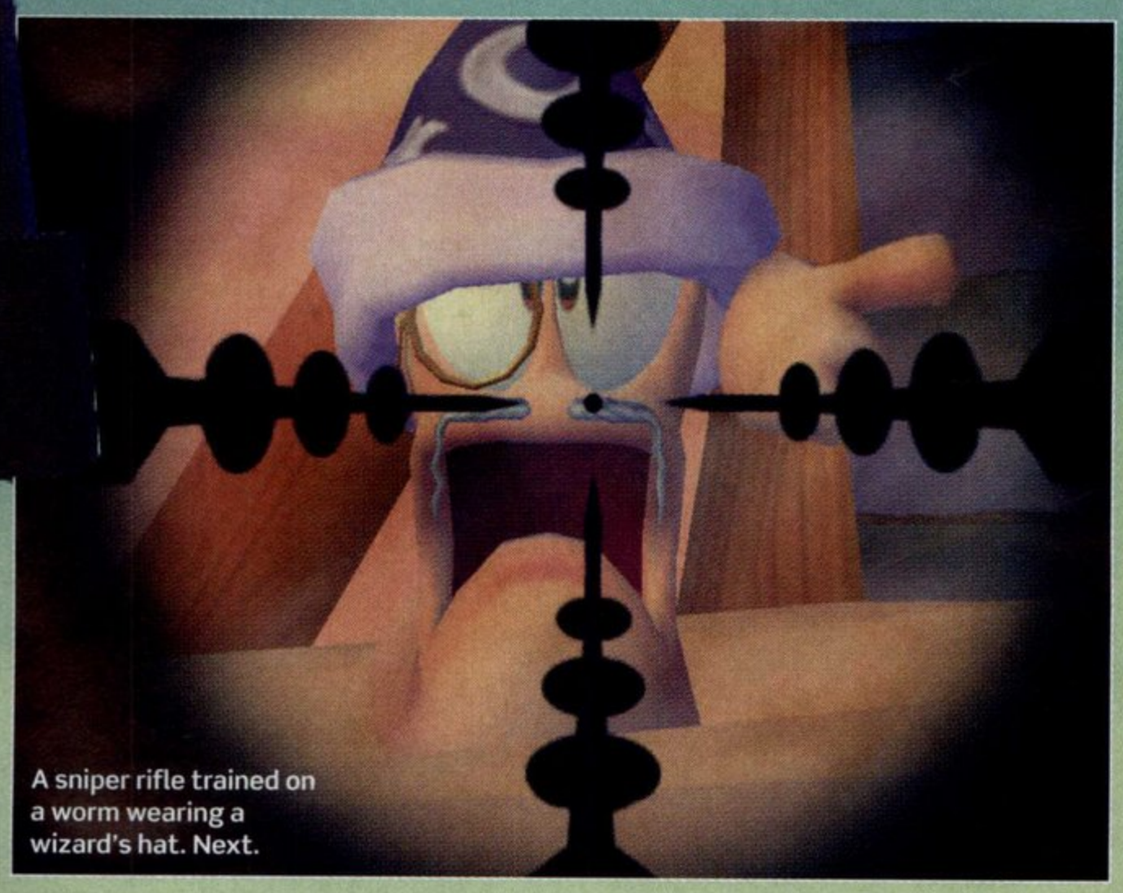
This sequel is more like it: customisable weapons, teleport pads... and if you didn't think the weapons could get more bizarre, you'd be wrong. It brings the worms back down to earth, where they like it. *Worms* was always about comedic destruction, like this.

ROSS ATHERTON

README

Publisher Codemasters
Developer Team 17
Link www.codemasters.co.uk/worms
New weapons, better balancing and no distractions. Pure Wormage.

"These rose-tinted glasses are rubbish: *Worms Forts* still looks lame."



A sniper rifle trained on a worm wearing a wizard's hat. Next.

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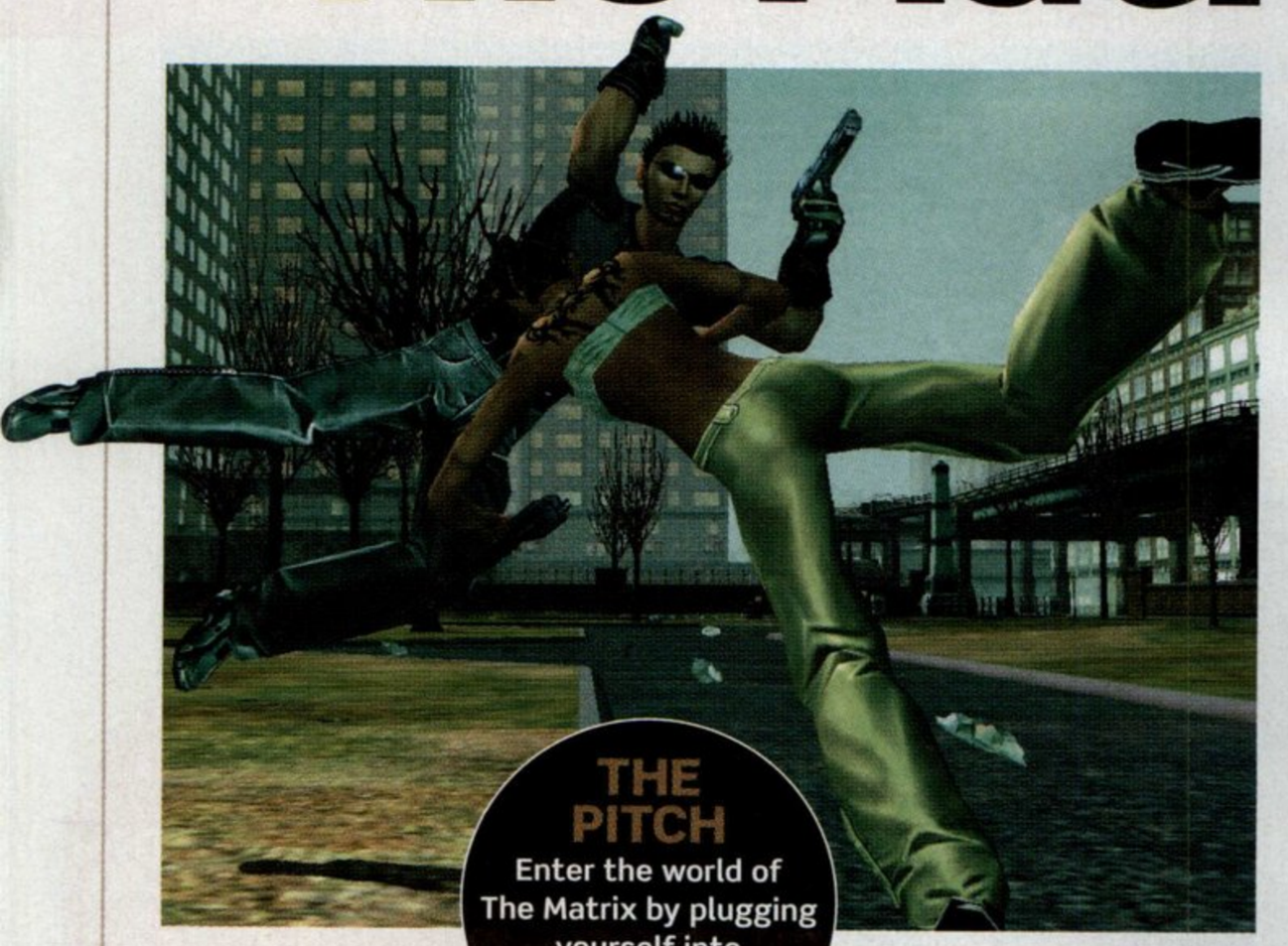
Do you know net-fu?

RELEASE MAY

The Matrix Online



THE PITCH
Enter the world of The Matrix by plugging yourself into an online game. Ah, the irony.

Develop your own, unique look. Or, wear mirror shades.

Too late, he began to see a flaw in his boast that he could beat her "with one hand glued to the floor."

Industrial post-punk and disco, together at last.

ON THE DISC Take Tom's red pill and jack yourself into his silicon matrix for more screenshots > Galleries

No one can be told what *The Matrix Online* is. Which ought to make this preview interesting, but we'll give it a go.

How we scoffed at first. "They'll never be able to make bullet-time work in a multiplayer game!" They could, and they did. As developers Monolith put it, the action goes into bullet-time "when something cool happens" in combat, rather than being controlled by a player. And there's plenty else that marks this MMO out from the crowd.

Online combat will be more strategic and demanding of a player's skills. In a fight, you'll select from a number of tactics that depend on your previous choices. You might be a gun specialist, you may indeed know kung-fu. If your rating in the chosen tactic is higher than your enemy's, your attack will succeed – but you'll need to follow up with the right moves, and be prepared to counter your enemy, all the while looking for weaknesses.

The action all takes place within a huge city, with players assuming the roles of newly 'awoken' humans – those who've opted for the red pill. You'll have the choice of which faction to fight for, so you won't necessarily have to side with the puny humans. The Machines and enigmatic Merovingians offer alternative routes to success and power, and your reputation among the three factions will shift according to whom you work for. Naturally, this will bring you into conflict with other players, though *TMO*'s player-versus-player combat is restricted to certain areas, so we don't see 'PKing' as a major game-breaker.

You don't have to side with puny humans

Beneath the surface, then, perhaps *TMO* isn't all that different to other online RPGs. Crafting exists, in the form of mining data and manipulating it into new items. Hunting down beasties becomes eliminating rogue programs. And like all MMOs, *The Matrix Online* is prone to slippage. Recently scheduled for a January US release, the date is now expected to be in May. Which may be just what's needed to give the game the polish it deserves.

ROSS ATHERTON

README

Publisher Sega
Developer Monolith
Link www.thematrixonline.com
Fans of the films will love it. But can it compete with the likes of *World of Warcraft*?

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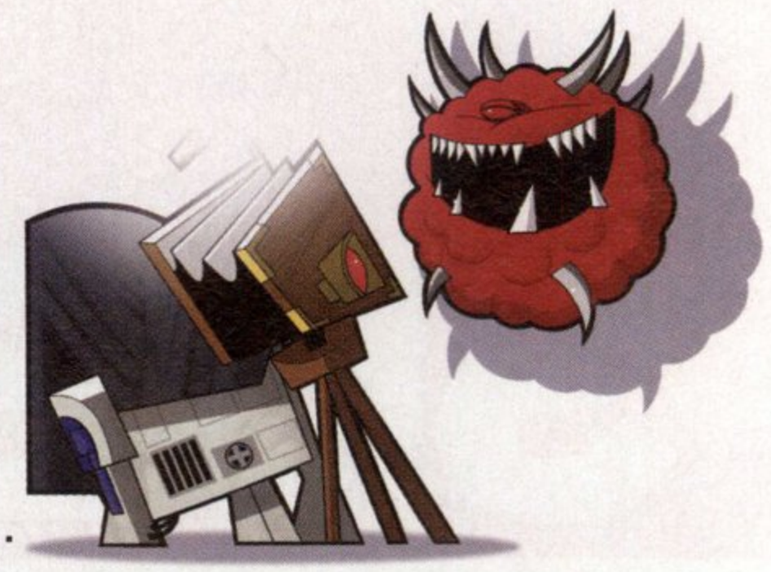
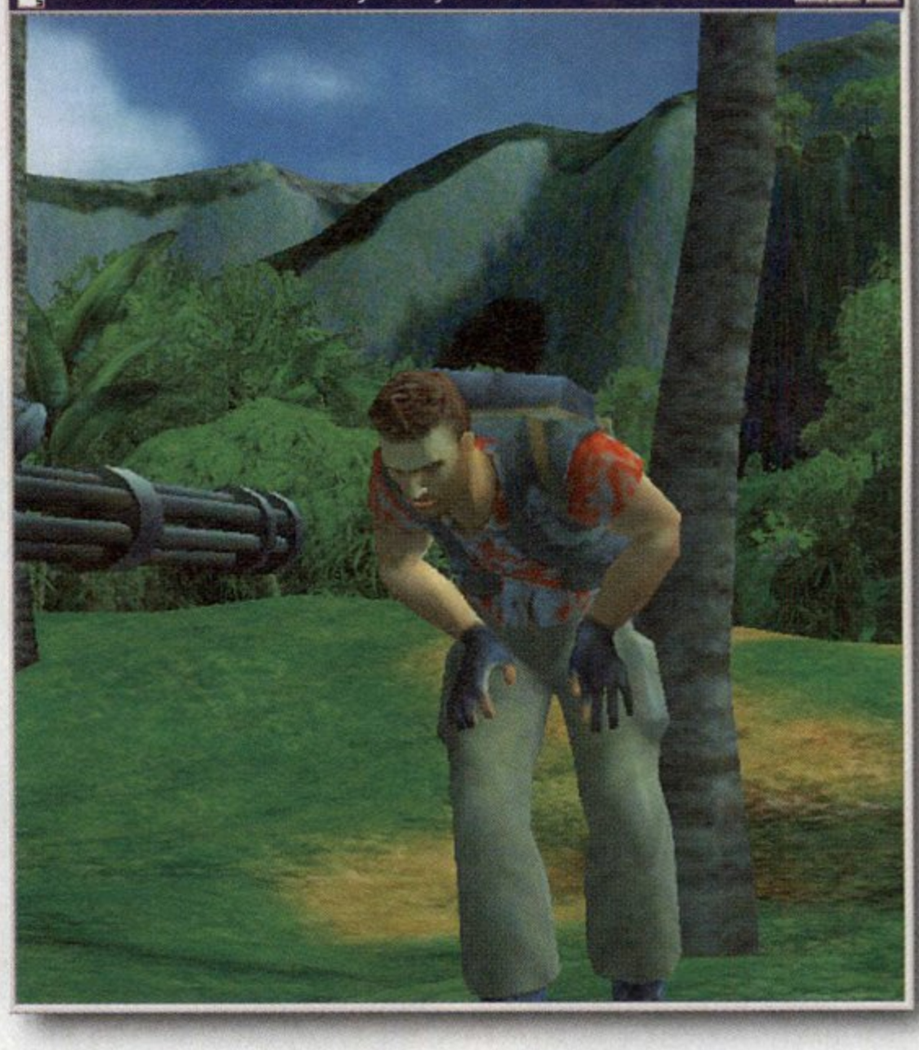
Gamer Snap

Half-Life 2 hilarity and other FPS foolishness...



"Old school, low-tech paintball proved surprisingly popular with the kids in City 17..." **James Beaty**

"Don't shoot! I've lost the keys to my Porsche!" **Colin Weber**



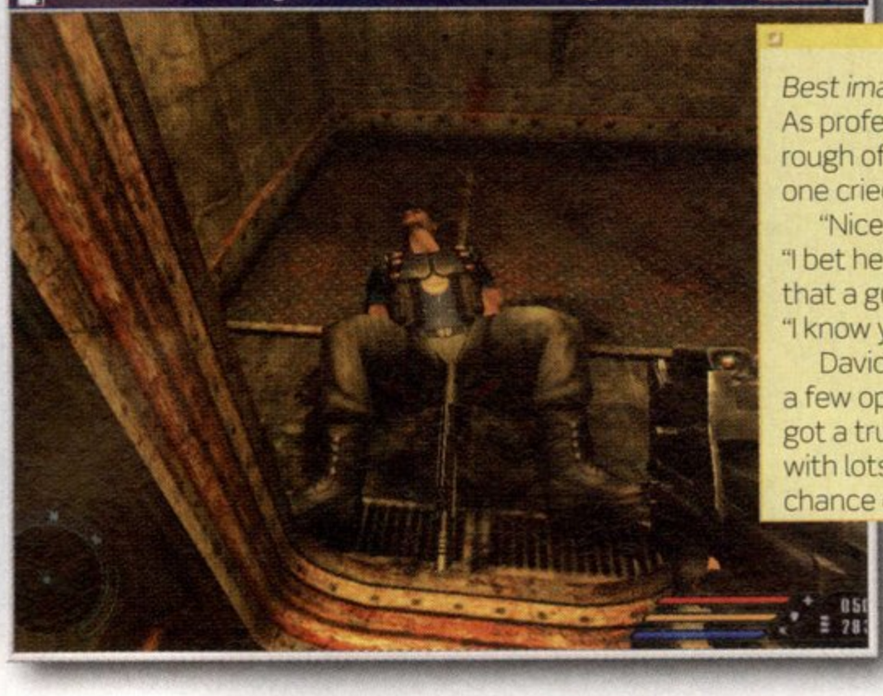
"No, I'm the only Gay in the village..." **James Beaty**

The first AA meeting was a shambles. **Anonymous**

"Those Papparazi are at it again!" **Marc**

The Half-Life 2 orgy kept strictly to its theme... **BoBAnubis**

"Just an inch too long..." **King_David_the_3**



Best image with a so-so caption...
As professional writers, it may be a bit rough of us to critique captioning, but this one cried out for something like:

"Nice body mod, but how's the recoil?", "I bet he just shoots from the hip...", "Is that a gun in your pocket or are you... Er", "I know you love your gun Bob, but..."

David did the smart thing and gave us a few options to choose from. If you've got a true 'Kodak moment', back it up with lots of comments for a better chance of being the snap of the month.

CREATIVE

Need a capture program? Use IrfanView on the cover disc! Then send your snap & witty caption to pcga@derwenthoward.com.au with "SNAP" as the subject. Funniest entry each month wins an excellent set of Creative T770 speakers!

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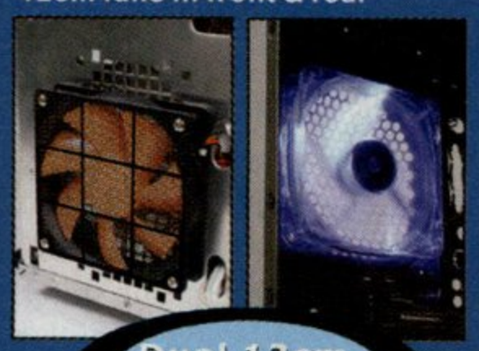

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Uncensored

Reader reviews, raw and unfiltered...

HALF-LIFE 2
Reviewed by Terrance Mulloy

PCGA 27, Score 96%

Half-Life 2 starts you off facing the infamous G-Man, the mysterious blue-suited character from the first game. Know one really knows what the G-Man intentions are, it is never made clear, but you can bet your gravity gun that the shifty bugger is up to no good.

Next stop, City 17 - A war torn urban centre that is the perfect backdrop for the last remnants of a defeated humanity. Black-clad security forces that look much like futuristic Nazi SWAT teams patrol the gritty, rundown streets. This is truly a terrifying, Orwellian vision of a dystopian police state, rendered chillingly life like.

Half-Life 2 is an immensely well-crafted game and a good example of the beauty that can transpire when innovative technology meets art.

The AI is smart and solid, the physics engine is by far one of the best featured in a PC game, the storyline is seamless and the action is both well balanced and diverse.

So I guess the only thing left for you to do now is go sell your cat, dog, Grandmother or even your own organs. Just make sure you go out and buy this game. Trust me, it's well worth it!

Graeme's Rating 91%

PCGA *responds: We really had to run this review just to remind people that they'd be doing themselves no favours at all if they flatly refused to give* Half-Life 2 *a go because of the whole installation nightmare that comes with Steam. Some may tell you that refusing to buy the game is the best way to send a message about your reaction to Steam to Valve, but just remember this - The game is more than worth the hassles, and they've sold so many copies now, they won't notice your silent protest.*

READER REVIEW OF THE MONTH

ROME: TOTAL WAR
Reviewed by Jim Rhodes

PCGA 26, Score 94%

At last; a game in which strategy and tactics are married to a fabulous interface. Gone are the pseudo boardgame qualities of *Medieval*. Instead we have a continuous map spanning Europe and the Mediterranean, where terrain and bottlenecks can be exploited.

Management of your settlements is now more involved, with governors a key concern, and their retinues candidates for a cabinet reshuffle. Having problems with a lard-brained philanderer pilfering from the coffers? You can now boot him out and leave the competent AI to do it for you.

Assassins can wreak havoc on cities by destroying key targets, and spies can be used to spread plague amongst your enemies, if you have a penchant for biological warfare. Which, lets face it, I'm sure most of us do.

Even Roman lollipops were built on an extravagant scale.

Sieges are spectacles worthy of a coliseum, massive war machines pounding walls and towers while defenders pour arrow fire and boiling oil onto those assaulting the gates. It may not be as comprehensive as *Stronghold*, but when it's this much fun, who cares?

Rome is a better game than *Half-Life 2*. Polished, competent and as smooth as you could ask for.

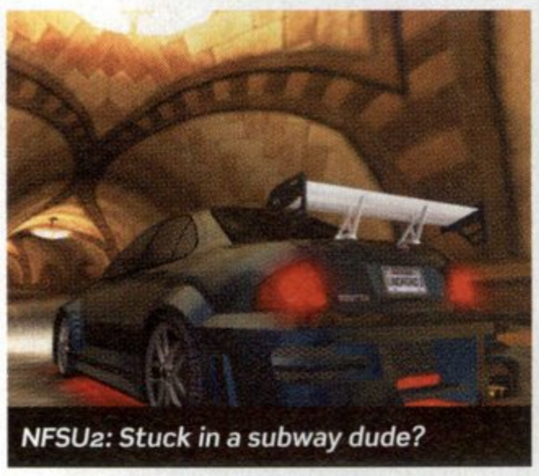
Jim's Rating 95%

PCGA *responds:* Rome *better than* Half-Life 2*? That's a big call, but you make a good case.*

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2
Reviewed by Alastair Ingason

PCGA 29, Score 90%

What hides beneath the flashy hood of *NFS Underground 2* is a competent and well running engine of a game. Starting with a basic car, you soon find yourself salivating over new alloys or a flashy-looking spoiler. What makes this so successful is that the upgrades make a real difference. The options you choose to visually improve your vehicle allow you to make a car that you as a player will become much more attached to.



NFSU2: Stuck in a subway dude?

How does the game run? The answer is pleasingly well. Gameplay is fast and furious, the lack of a set difficulty welcome.

The downside is a lack of any damage models on the cars, although you can dislodge road signs and traffic cones from the course. This isn't an in-depth simulation of street racing. There is also no LAN option included – a shame, as this game could make for some great LAN parties.

NFS Underground 2 is all about style, looks and speed. Which it pulls off very well, but it also has a competent racing game hidden underneath that garishly painted surface. A great game for racing fans who enjoy the style and graphical quality of *Grand Turismo* or the mayhem and close encounters of the *Burnout* series.

Alastair's Rating 87%

PCGA *responds: Seeing as you enjoy* NFSU2*, we'll have a scoop next issue you won't want to be missing...*

JNC

The reader review of the month wins an awesome portable JNC SSF-31 MP3 Player!
Send your words to pcga@derwenthoward.com.au with "UNCENSORED" as the subject, along with your contact details. Reviews must be 120-200 words so we can print them!

ASUS DVD Burners enable 16X Burning with 8X Discs

Although DVD burning technology has progressed to 16X, the supply of disc media supporting this new high-speed standard remains low. Even if you are one of the lucky few that is in possession of these expensive discs, you still have to worry about burning reliability unless you want a stack of overpriced coasters.

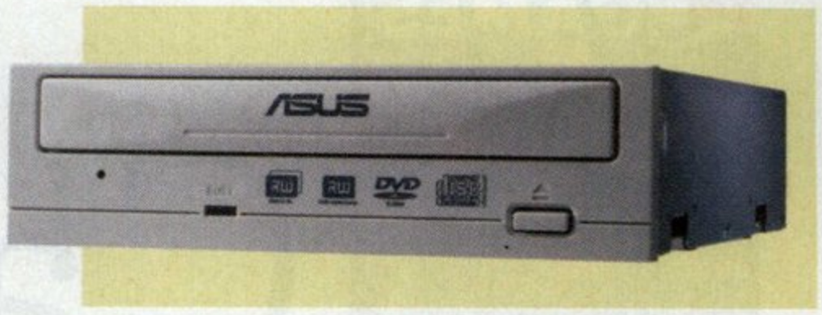
Optical drive makers, of course, won't let their technological advancements go to waste. Take ASUS for example, the company introduced an innovative feature called "Over-Speed Burning". This feature enables users to enjoy fast 16X burning with 8X discs, which are more readily available and more affordable. It's a cost-effective way to shorten burning time.

Double burning speed on dual-layer disks

Over-Speed Burning also supports double-layer discs, which offer large data capacity up to 8.5GB, roughly 2,000 MP3 songs. Most double-layer discs at the moment support 2.4X speed, meaning to burn a full disc takes approximately 40 to 50 minutes. 4X discs are available as well, but higher speed also comes with higher price. With Over-Speed Burning, you can burn an 8.5GB, 2.4X double-layer disc in only 26 minutes.

Disc quality detection for best burning speed

The advantages of Over-Speed Burning are pretty obvious. The one thing you need to pay special attention to is disc quality. Please make sure you purchase discs approved by the manufacturer of your drive. ASUS implement a mechanism for disc quality detection and intelligently adjust for the most suitable burning speeds to prevent poor quality and damaged discs.



In conclusion, if you know what to look for, enjoying the fastest burning speed doesn't necessarily have to mean emptying your wallet. DVD burners with Over Speed Burning are excellent solutions as the shortage of 16X and 4X dual-layer discs continue and these discs remain expensive.

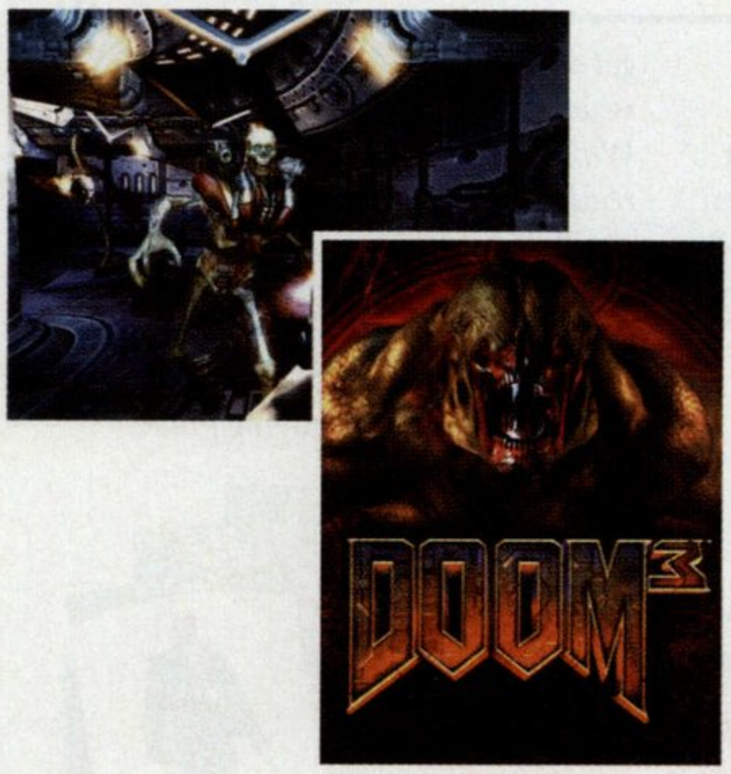
Double layer burning comparison

Disc media	Burning speed	Burning time	Good	Bad
2.4X	2.4X	40-50 min	· Disc is easily attainable · Affordable	Long burning time
4X	4X	26 min	· Short burning time	Supply is low Very expensive
2.4X	Over Speed at 4X	26 min	· Disc is easily attainable · Affordable · Short burning time	High-quality discs needed

The Choice of Expert Gamers

ASUS Gamer Edition Cards Deliver Big Bang for the Buck

The launch of new titles such as Lineage II and Doom 3 should propel a wave of system upgrades among serious gamers, since more powerful video performance is needed to smoothly run the latest 3D games. Taking into account that many gamers probably don't have huge budgets to enhance their gaming systems, ASUS, a leading provider of graphics solutions, recently introduced special Gamer Edition video cards, which offer explosive graphics at affordable prices.



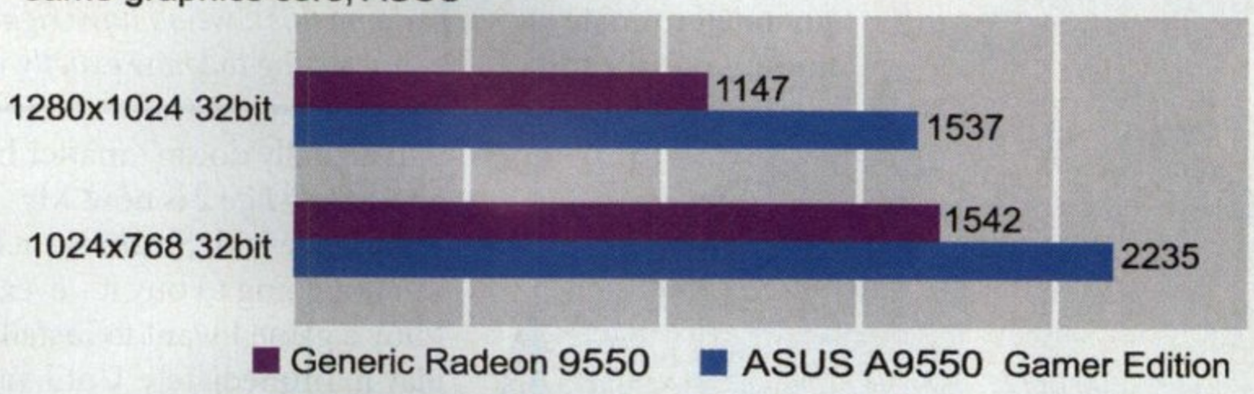
Improved circuitry and memory modules

Gamer Edition cards, as the name suggests, are specifically tailored towards keen gamers. Gamer Edition cards have redesigned circuit boards, upgraded memory specifications along with other extra features. Compared with solutions supporting the same graphics core, ASUS Gamer Edition cards deliver superior video performance.

For example, the ASUS A9550 Gamer Edition (supporting ATI's Radeon 9550 chipset) provides a 25% performance increase compared with typical Radeon 9550-based graphics cards. And the ASUS V9250 Gamer Edition (supporting Nvidia's FX5200 chipset) is 50% more powerful than other FX5200 solutions.

Same performance using lower-end graphics core

It takes strong engineering to be able to redesign the reference card. The ASUS V9999 Gamer Edition runs on Nvidia's 6800 chipset, but the card's performance actually approaches those supporting the next-level chipset, the 6800GT.



3D Mark 2003

With higher-end memory, the prices of Gamer Edition cards are slightly higher than solutions using the same graphics core, but enable far better video capability. ASUS Gamer Edition is currently the choice of many gaming experts and users who demand top-of-the-line visual effects. Give a little more and you'll get back so much more.

Cables

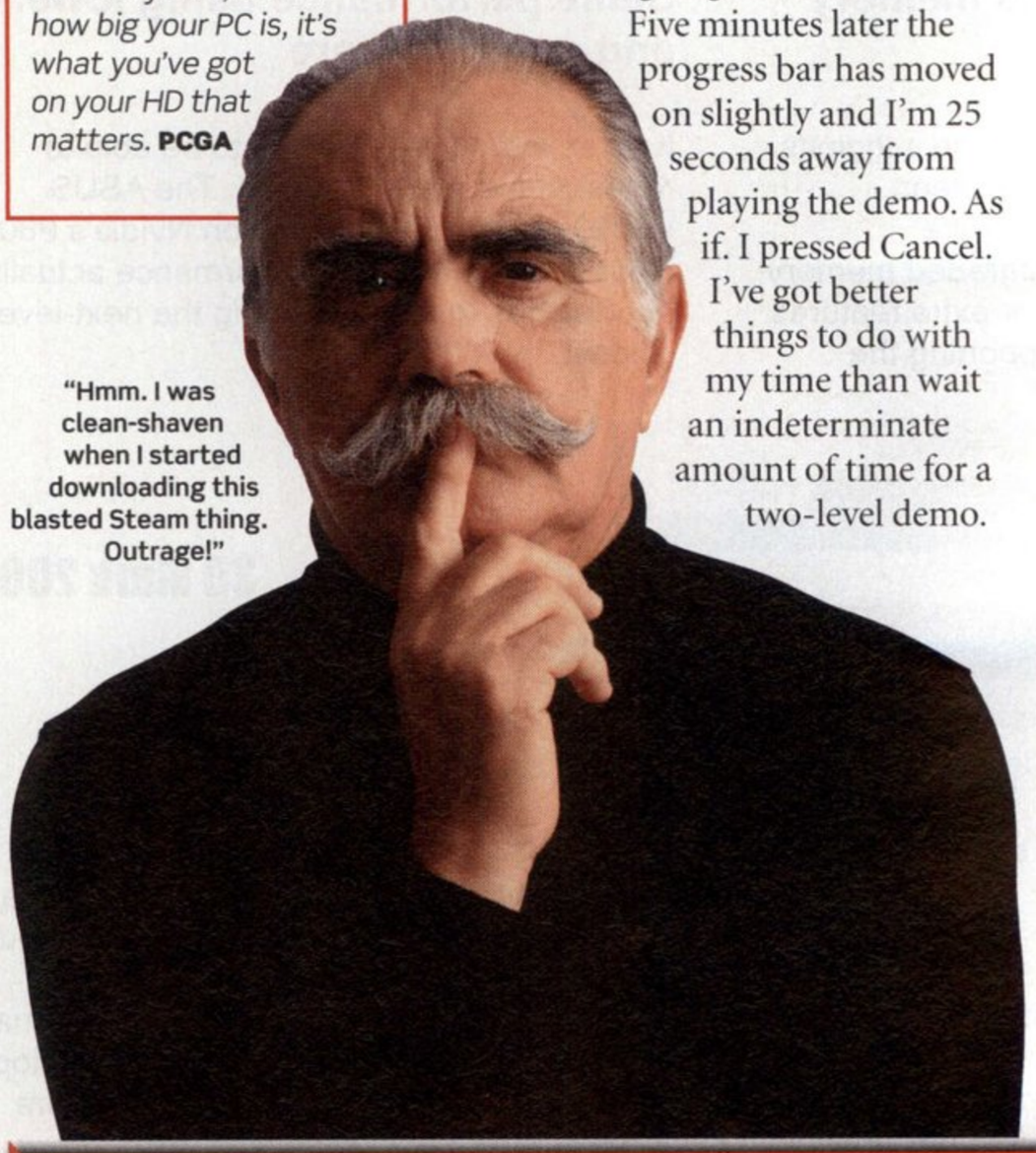
Illustrations by **David Lyttleton**

The retirement home for senile letters

SHORTS

This is getting me very annoyed now. Why do people make crap games? What must drive them to sit in an office and make crap that wastes money that could have gone to a good game?
Christopher Morris
Developers never want to make crap games, but it's almost always the publisher funding the game that pushes for a release before it's good enough. **PCGA**

I have an FX55, X800XT PCIe, 2GB Corsair TwinX, an A8N Deluxed SLI PCIe mobo and twin 74GB Raptor HDDs. Suck me sideways.
Ben
Impressive gaming rig, but really Ben, it's not how big your PC is, it's what you've got on your HD that matters. **PCGA**



"Hmm. I was clean-shaven when I started downloading this blasted Steam thing. Outrage!"

Steamsucks70

Since I'd been deliberately avoiding *Half-Life 2* because of Steam and had been weakened by the tales of wonder from some of my mates, I thought I'd install the demo which you had on your discs.

Up pops the Steam installation screen. I paused for a moment before selecting an appropriate account name: "steamsucks". It was with wry amusement that I selected steamsucks70 from a choice of three alternatives numbered 70, 533, and 1037. It seemed I was on a road well travelled by people before me.

30 minutes later I'm on my second beer and *still* waiting for the demo to start. The new horror that has been unleashed on the world is Steam-Time. According to the Steam screen my demo would be running in 30 seconds. Yeah right. If that's the case why is the progress bar only half full and my internet connection going flat out?

Five minutes later the progress bar has moved on slightly and I'm 25 seconds away from playing the demo. As if. I pressed Cancel. I've got better things to do with my time than wait an indeterminate amount of time for a two-level demo.

It actually doesn't matter how good *Half-Life 2* is now. My experience with Steam is such that I'm not going to buy it - ever. When I buy a game I want to install it and play it. Immediately. Until Valve grasp that fact I'll be spending my money elsewhere.
Darren Latham, email

You're not alone in your anger at Valve, as we got more than a few complaints about the time taken to get the Half-Life 2 *demo going on issue 30 DVD.*
While we never enjoy putting our readers through grief, the only way the Half-Life 2 *demo was available was with the Steam installer. It may have sucked to deal with, but at least now you know what the problems are with Steam without having put money down to find out.*
PCGA

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Spinelessly complied with

I'm writing to you to set the record straight regarding the refusal of retailers to return or refund PC software. I'm a senior sales assistant for a major games retailer. As always in this industry, retail seems to be bearing the brunt of many people's frustration. I would love to be able to return each and every game that customers have a genuine problem with and offer a full refund. Unfortunately this is no longer the case. We as retailers have, as far as I've heard, been told to stop returning PC titles by the publishers of the games. They seem to assume that everyone who buys a PC game and then returns it has pirated it and wants to enjoy a free game.

We get it from both ends: the publishers pressing us to comply with their demands and the customers wanting to return a game that doesn't work. I want to stand up for retailers of PC software everywhere and tell the world that we try our best, we honestly do, we understand your frustrations but there is literally nothing we can do to help. Take your gripes up with the publishers who our directors have spinelessly complied with. Let them know your frustrations and concerns, and please don't take it out on us.
Name withheld (for job security reasons)

Well, that was news to us. We'd always assumed that store policy dictated the return of PC games. This requires some further investigation on our behalf (partly because we find it hard to believe all games retailers are doing this); we all have rights when buying a product, and it'll be interesting to know exactly where we stand on this. **PCGA**

ATARI

The best letter of the month wins a bundle of great games from Atari's 'Heroes' range. Send your rants, ravings and reactions to **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au** with "CABLES" as the subject. Long or vulgar letters may be edited to fit or toned down accordingly...

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YOUR CHANCE

Win, win, WIN!!

WIN! A copy of Brothers in Arms

Experience the ultimate in authentic WWII gaming!

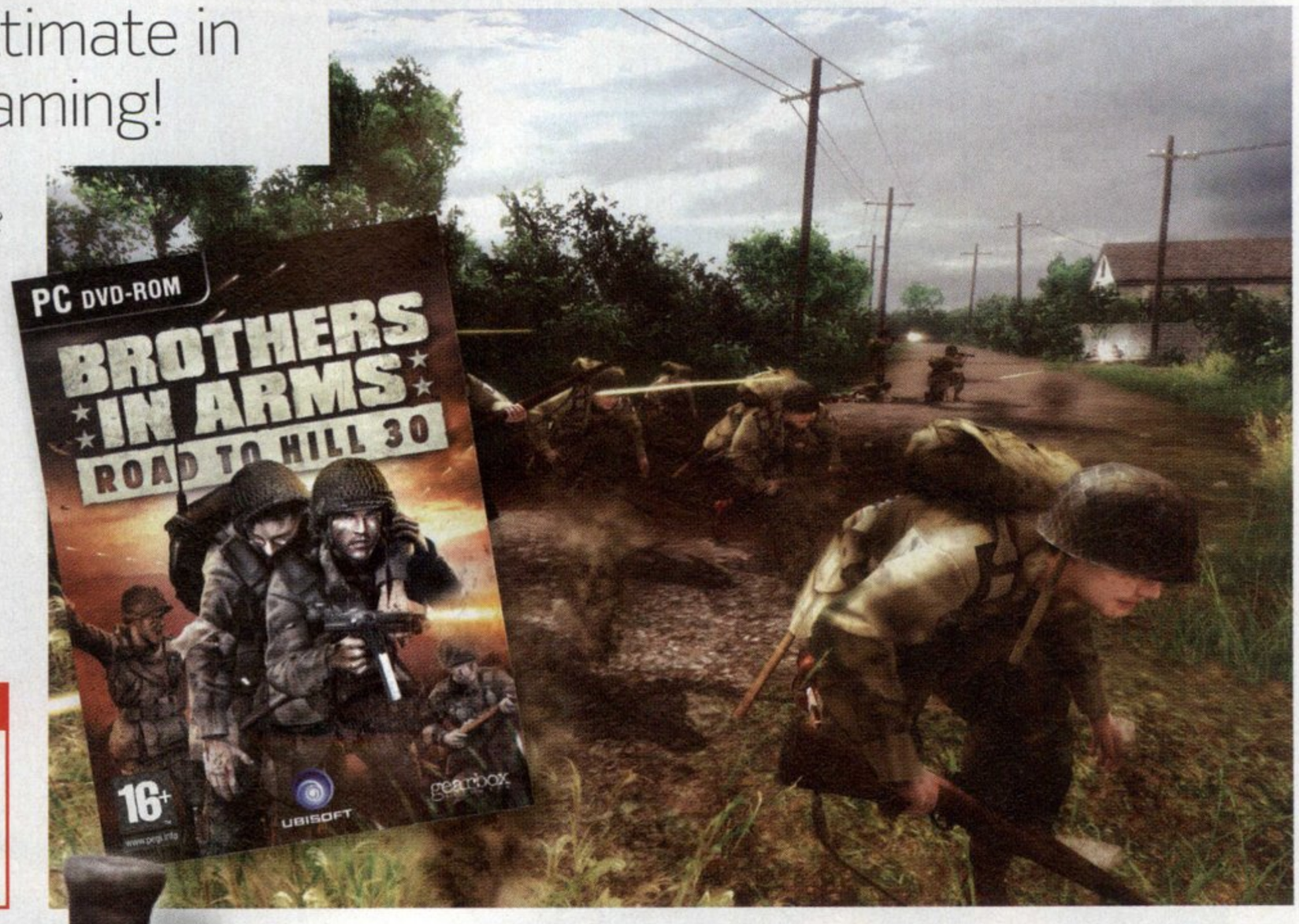
Tired of the endless droves of 'Me too!' WWII games on PC? So were the guys at Gearbox, who went about creating something special…

Ubisoft wanted to share their amazingly authentic WWII experience with some PCGA readers, so they fired us a volley of 10 copies of ***Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30*** to give away.

To enter, just describe in 100 words or less what you think was the best hand-held firearm of WWII, and why. The ten best answers win.

TO ENTER:

Send your entry via email to: pcga@derwenthoward.com.au with the subject of 'PCGA BIA comp', and of course your contact details.



WIN!

Sacred: Underworld & mighty miniature

A true treat for fans of Ascaron's epic fantasy Role-Playing game

You're a fan of last year's non-linear RPG epic *Sacred*? If that's the case, you've got the perfect opportunity to snap up one of five Sacred prize packs, with a copy of the upcoming expansion - *Sacred: Underworld*, along with a limited edition Sacred metallic figurine .

A pack will go to the five best ideas submitted for a new *Sacred* character class (100 words or less).

TO ENTER:

Type your entry into an email to: pcga@derwenthoward.com.au with the subject of 'PCGA Sacred comp' with your contact details and answer.

Entry details: 1) All entries must be via email to **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au** and the subject MUST match the one given in blue near the end of the competition text. 2) Each person is allowed one entry only. 3) Offers are limited to Australia & New Zealand only. 4) All entries are judged by PC Games Addict editor, their decision is final. 5) Entries close on 03/05/05

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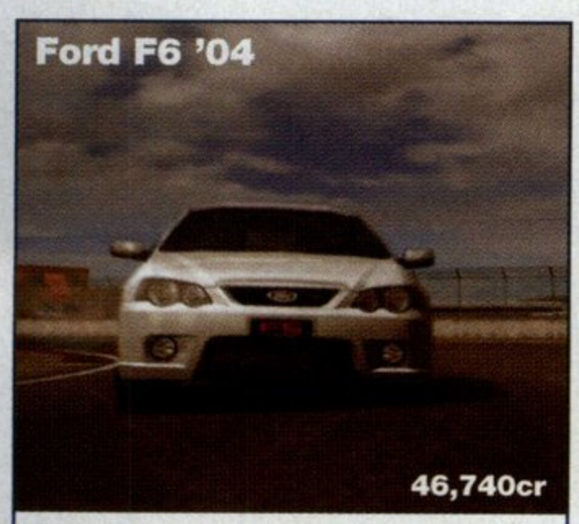

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PC GAMES ADDICT

REVIEWS

In which we put the new releases before our team of PC gaming experts

Soldiering on...

It's a month of steady progress for PC gaming

Despite ever increasing expectations, PC game developers appear to be able to at least continually move towards those lofty goals, and this is a month that shows that. The paradigm leaps and genre-defining games can't arrive all the time in a world where games take years to make, but it's comforting to see that things aren't stagnating in-between. *Brothers in Arms* isn't a flawless game, but it shows that working tactical elements into a shooter doesn't have to detract from the action. Whether or not this will pick up as a multiplayer hit remains to be seen, but the solo campaign is compelling enough to encourage standards in wartime shooters to keep rising.

Another shooter that's evolving is the SWAT series, with the forth installment feeling less cumbersome than its predecessors ever did. It hasn't become more shallow, it's become more accessible – A real limiting factor for tactical shooters.

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory is a step forward on the strengths of its visuals alone, but Sam Fisher has also brought enough new tricks in his kit bag to make this more than just one for suckers for pretty games.

Of course, not everything this month was a bastion of progressive game development. *Playboy the Mansion* struggled to prove itself as a game rather than tittilation, and *The Punisher* let comic fans down badly.

Still, the steps forward outnumber those taken back. So long as that's the case, we've got little to complain about. Not many forms of entertaining keep on progressing like this.

DAN TOOSE
EDITOR

Scrutinised this issue...

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The PCGA review rig

New games, old system – that's a recipe for disappointment when you're trying to get the best out of your gaming experience.

That's why we choose to review our games on the Alienware City 17 gaming rig, which gives us the confidence to crank every game we play as far as they'll go. And hey, we're not turning to these guys just so we can flaunt the impressive system specs we're playing with – Alienware is known far and wide as the company to turn to when you want to take your PC games as far as they can go.

THE PC GAMES ADDICT REVIEW MACHINE:

- AMD Athlon 64 FX-55 CPU
- ABit AV8 - VIA K8T800 Pro Motherboard
- ATI Radeon RX800XT 256MB 256-bit DDR3, DVI, VIVO, HDTV, S-Video/Composite - AGP
- Corsair 2GB Dual Channel DDR PC-3200XL Xtra Low Latency (200MHz) – 2 x 1024MB
- Serial ATA RAID 0 - 320GB (160GB x 2) Hitachi Deskstar 7.200RPM w/ 16MB cache
- Sony 16x Dual Layer DVD Recorder
- Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2 ZS High Definition 7.1 Surround Firewire (IEEE 1394)
- Alienware Full-Tower case
- Alienware 480W Power

Reviewed on

ALIENWARE®

Our Scoring System Explained

0-19% ABOMINABLE
Game crime. If you see this game do not approach. Call the appropriate authorities and have it removed.

20-49% POOR
A deeply troubled and troubling effort. Think twice, even if you find it lurking in the bargain bin.

50-69% MEDIOCRE
Fans of the theme or genre can extract limited fun if they persevere. Otherwise, put your wallet away.

70-84% GOOD
Consistently enjoyable but lacks that spark of genius. Superior alternatives are usually available.

85-89% EXCELLENT
A first-class title that guarantees great gaming. Fans of the genre will revel in it.

90%+ EXCEPTIONAL
Instant classic. These games are worth trying even if you don't normally like the genre.

THE PCGA AWARD

Just as our scoring system implies, if it gets 85% or higher, it's a game worthy of your hard earned dollar. Our **GOLD GAME** award willhelp you spot games **PCGA** recommend.

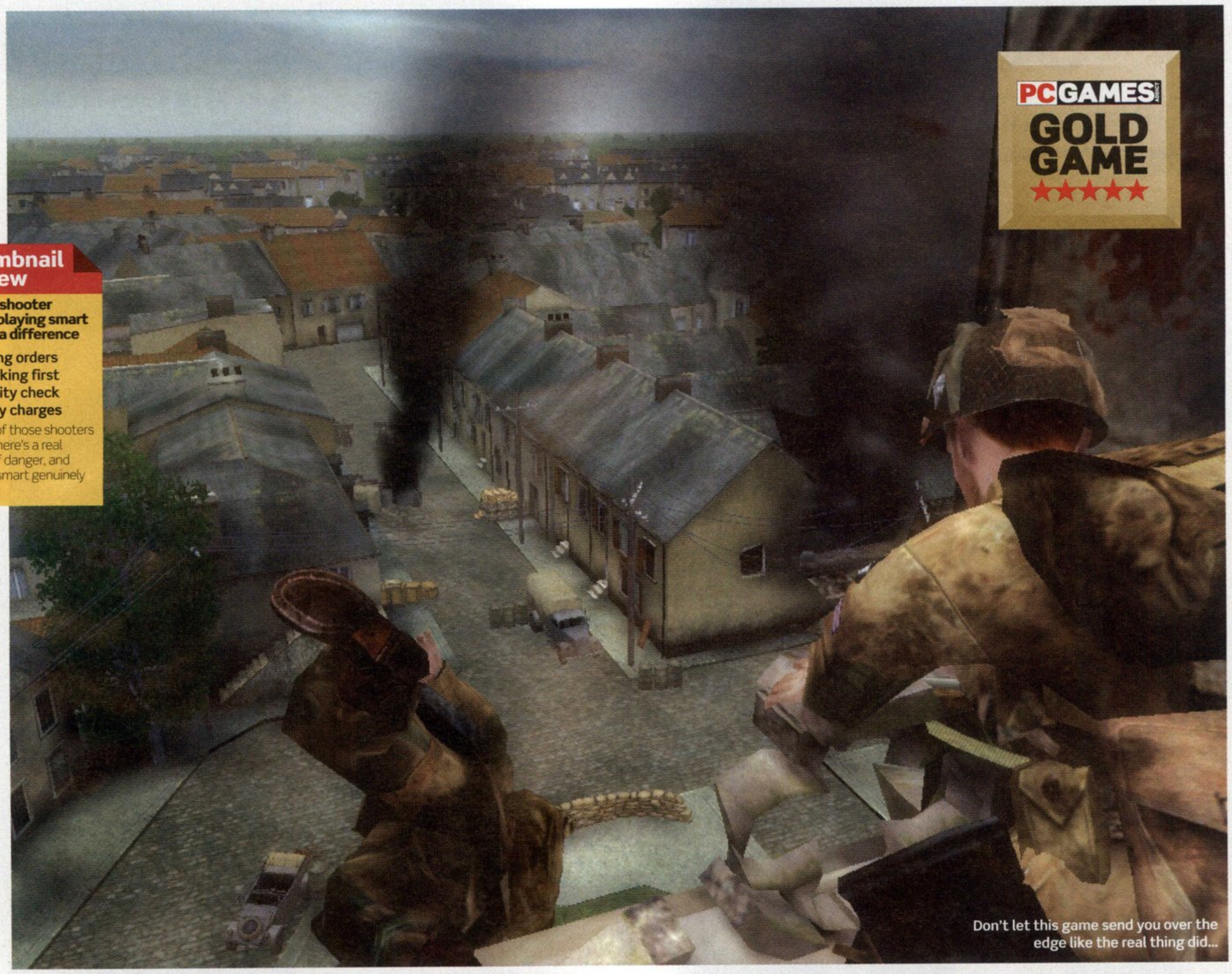
PC GAMES GOLD GAME ★★★★★

RIGHT TO REPLY

Think we've treated a game unfairly? Or perhaps we've gone too easy on a game. Address your redress to **pcga@derwenthoward.com.au** or write to us via snail mail by sending your correspondence to **Feedback, PC Games Addict, Derwent Howard, PO Box 1037, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355**

BROTHERS IN ARMS ROAD TO HILL 30

If you want a smart shooter, don't let this be the 'Road Not Taken'



Don't let this game send you over the edge like the real thing did...

Thumbnail Review

A WWII shooter where playing smart makes a difference

- ☑ Giving orders
- ☑ Thinking first
- ☑ Reality check
- ☒ Glory charges

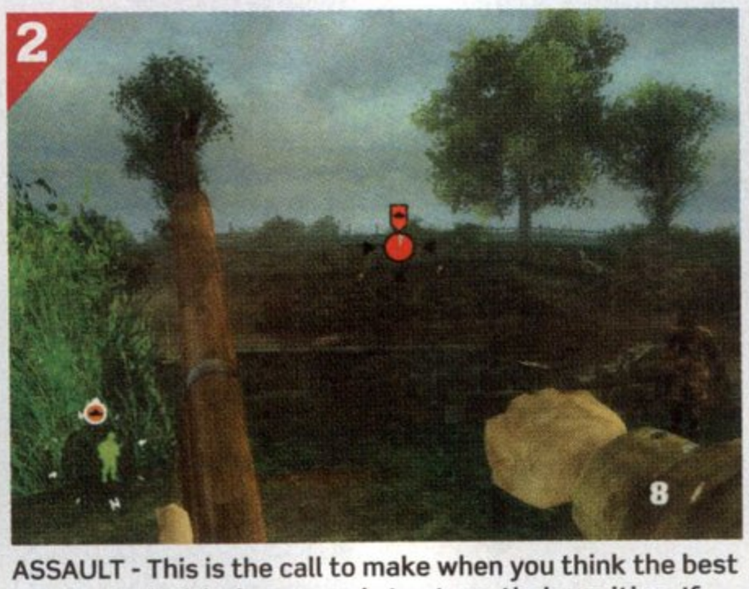
It's one of those shooters where there's a real sense of danger, and playing smart genuinely pays off.

TIME OUT!

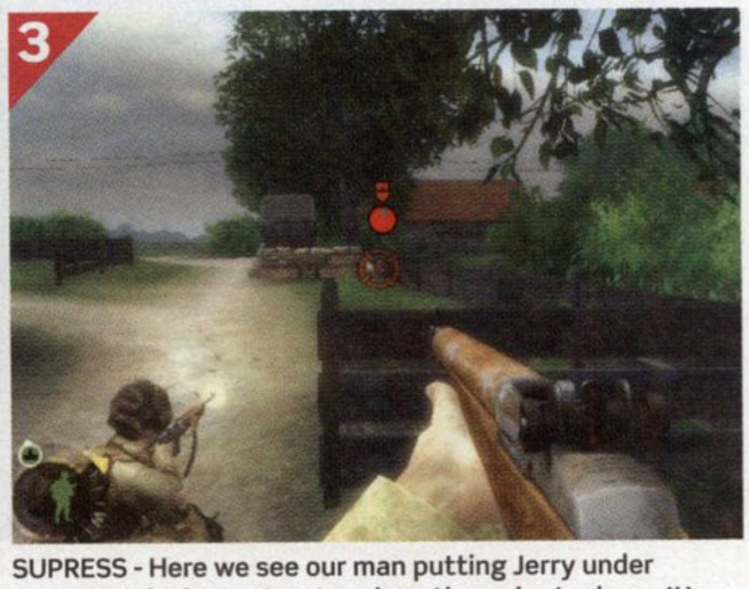
Made to order...

A look at how Gearbox have made bossing people about a pleasant experience...

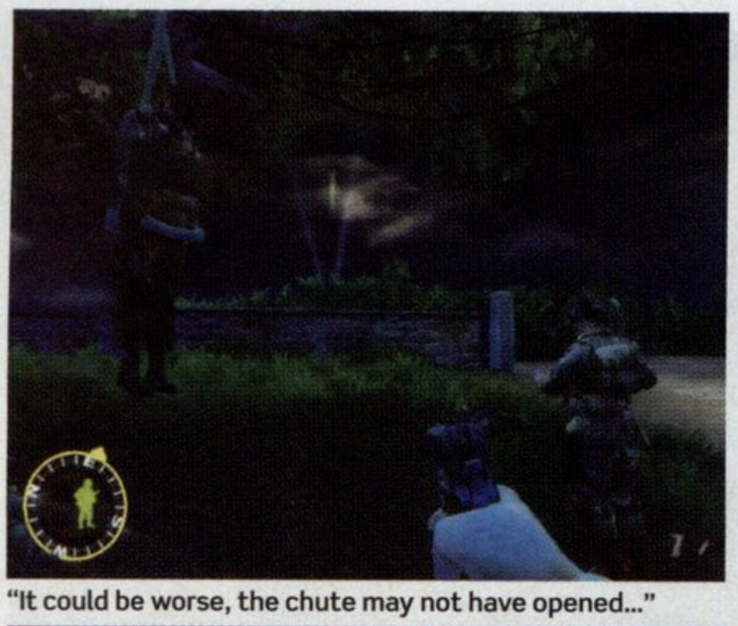
ADVANCE - The beauty of BIA's advanced AI is that simply telling your troops where to run will automatically have them taking cover around the spot you tell them to go



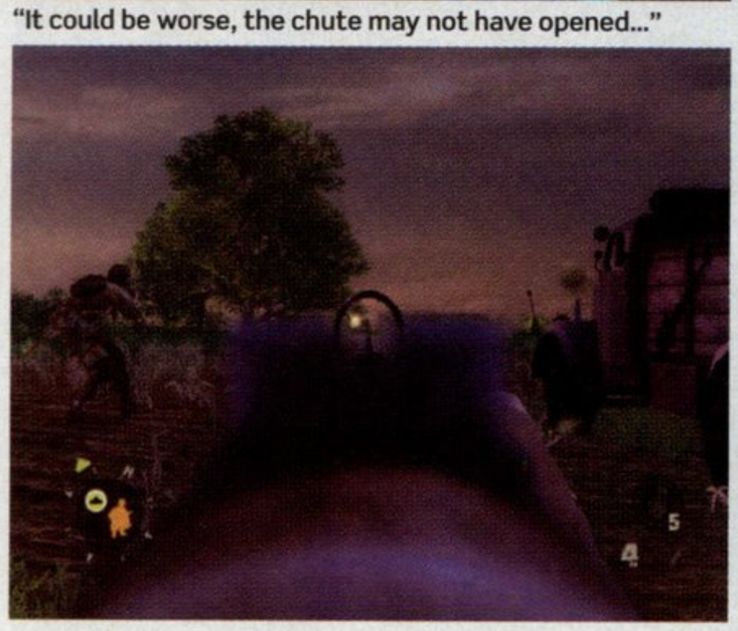
ASSAULT - This is the call to make when you think the best way to deal with the enemy is to storm their position. If the enemy is supressed, it's a far less suicidal order to give



SUPRESS - Here we see our man putting Jerry under pressure, the instant we've given the order to do so. It's as simple as right-clicking on the target you want hassled

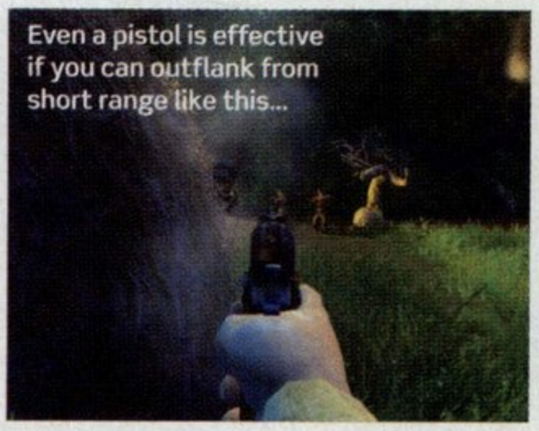


"It could be worse, the chute may not have opened..."



Be very quiet, we're hunting Aryans...

"The inflight safety manual said nothing about this!"



Even a pistol is effective if you can outflank from short range like this...

We're at a point in gaming now that musicians of the modern era have discovered long ago – It's largely all been done. Sure, there's always be change, but truly original games are as uncommon as new styles of music. It's mostly about inspiration and refinement, and *Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30* is a classic example of such a phenomena, though it draws from two sources, not one. Take the nervewracking front-seat view of WWII from *Call of Duty* and the squad tactics of *Full Spectrum Warrior* and you've got the basis of Ubisoft's grueling wartime 'adventure' game.

You are Sgt. Matt Baker of the American 101st Airborne Infantry, it's 1944 and you're about to experience hell on a trip to France. Gearbox have gone to lengths to show what made Matt's journey hell, and in true gaming fashion, the plot goes south before you've taken the reins. While prepping to jump over Normandy the plane is hit hard by AA guns, taking the issue of bravery out of the jump. Naturally Baker is separated from his comrades, but this serves as the perfect way to ease the player into the game's controls and features in a way that makes them feel like useful tools, not things they player is forced to learn.

To think of *Brothers in Arms* as a simple hybrid of existing games would be unfair, as Gearbox have really gone all out to instill loads of tangible emotion into the recreation of a true story in a game format. While *Call of Duty* drew on history to create some incredible scenarios, *BIA* is based on the actual events that faced the US 101st Airborne division.

Even though this game looks a lot like *Call of Duty*, the emphasis that Gearbox have placed on suppression and outflanking techniques makes the main challenge far more akin to *Full Spectrum Warrior*. The reality of the situation for a WWII soldier was that being out in the open was like resting your head on the chopping block – Heroics usually involve more death than glory. Fortunately, this sense of virtual mortality makes surviving every encounter rewarding.

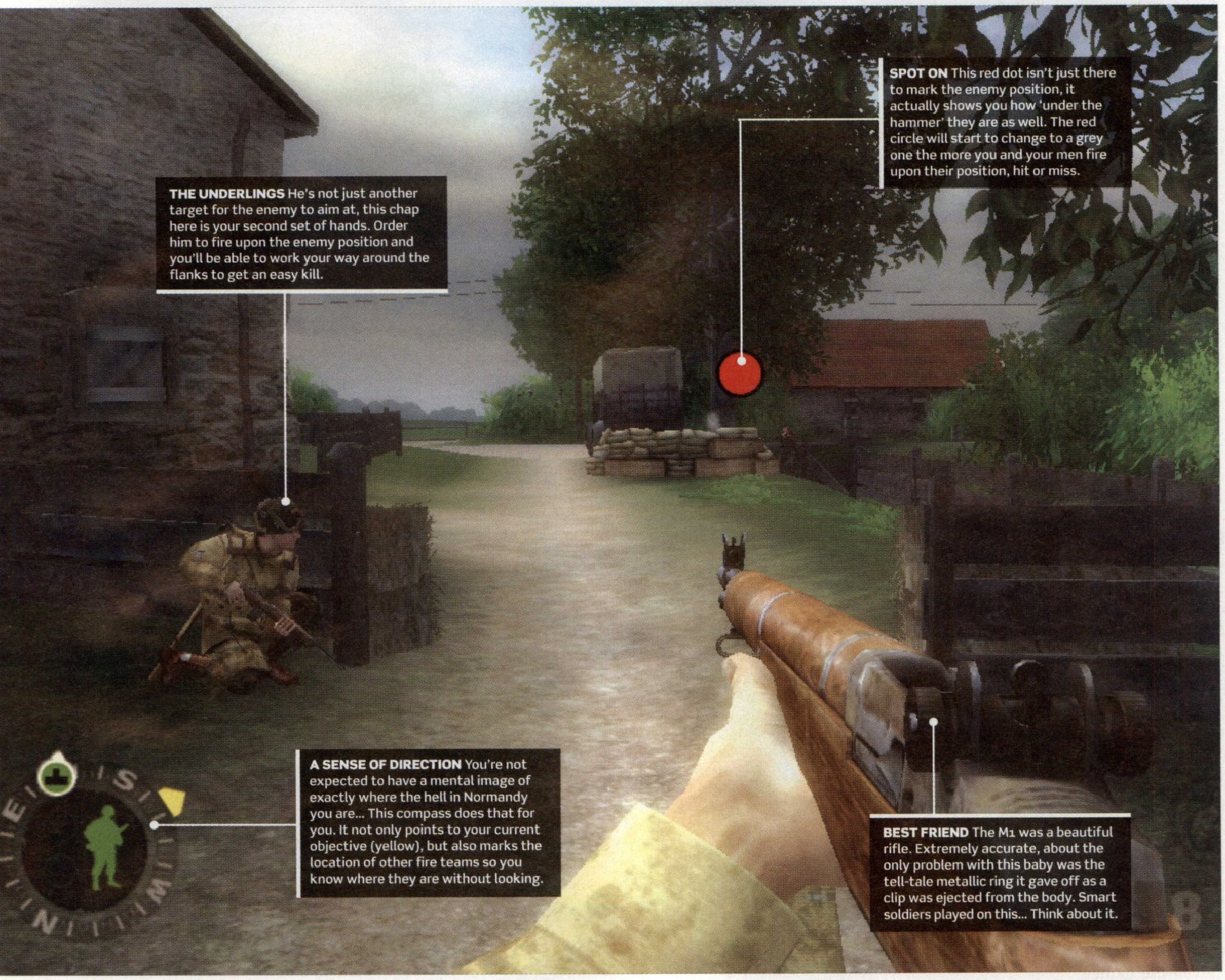
BIA is based on the actual events...

What's most clever about the way *FSW*-style tactics have been worked into *Brothers in Arms* is the simplicity of the interface. *Call of Duty* players will just need a moment to get used to using the RMB order a fire-team about rather than look down the sights, then they'll be off. Holding down the RMB creates a context-sensitive icon that shows what orders are being given to the fire-team under Baker's command. A circle appears on the ground when things are clear, and when placed over an enemy the player can simply suppress the target, or order them to assault it – which is considerably riskier.

Before sending troops to their death, a quick look at the tactical view allows the player to formulate a plan. This is one license the player is granted, the ability to stop time and get a lay of the land, as well as troop positions. Being able to 'pause' is a major advantage, but unlike in most strategy games, the player is unable to issue orders while time stands still. So in essence, it really just allows the sort of perception you'd have from being there that a rectangular screen just can't replicate properly. It also makes the act of thinking about how to fight a readily enjoyable one, rather than a tedious ▶

TAKEN APART

Making sense of the slaughter


THE UNDERLINGS He's not just another target for the enemy to aim at, this chap here is your second set of hands. Order him to fire upon the enemy position and you'll be able to work your way around the flanks to get an easy kill.
SPOT ON This red dot isn't just there to mark the enemy position, it actually shows you how 'under the hammer' they are as well. The red circle will start to change to a grey one the more you and your men fire upon their position, hit or miss.
A SENSE OF DIRECTION You're not expected to have a mental image of exactly where the hell in Normandy you are... This compass does that for you. It not only points to your current objective (yellow), but also marks the location of other fire teams so you know where they are without looking.
BEST FRIEND The M1 was a beautiful rifle. Extremely accurate, about the only problem with this baby was the tell-tale metallic ring it gave off as a clip was ejected from the body. Smart soldiers played on this... Think about it.

distracting chore.

Hearing Baker call out the order to move or fire with a chopping wave of his free hand is a lovely touch that really makes the difference. It feels more like something you're doing, and less like an interface quirk.

The thing that is more directly responsible for *BIA's* impact on the player is the way the other troops behave and interact with Baker. Even though the way they celebrate victories is glorious, the more prevalent idea brought forward is of that of the effect of war on the human spirit, and the bond between soldiers. The brutal introduction into the campaign drives this home from the outset. We shall not talk of the story except to say that it is based on a true one, and is compelling to live through - virtually, not in reality. It's all very convincing.

Not everything about this game however is conducive to suspending disbelief. One aspect of *BIA's* realism that prompts a question is the barrel sway, which is just a bit too profound at times. If Gearbox were so determined to make standing and taking a shot an imprecise action, they should have allowed for the player to rest their gun against something as they aim to counter this. Also, not being able to lay prone is an oddity, as it would have added some variety in the way the player looks at cover. Since suppression is a key part of *BIA's* gameplay, that variety would have shaken off the only element that really felt overly simplified (probably for console gamers).

Not being able to lay prone is an oddity...

What isn't simplified though is the challenge, and that's the main thing. Gearbox offer a host of authentic WWII documentation and info as the player goes through the levels of the game at increasing levels of difficulty. These extras include everything from photographs, weapon specs, letters and so on, making a virtual military museum for the game. But really, it's the challenge itself that's the real extra. Unlocking and playing at the uppermost difficulty setting ensures those that want something to tackle get a satisfying project to take on.

Sadly, Gearbox weren't able to find a magic solution to the issue of keeping plot-centric characters alive in a truly convincing manner. It's a bit of an issue when you're trying to convey a sense that anyone could go anytime. Even though losing troops to injury in battle is bad enough that the player naturally wants to avoid doing so, having them patched up by the time the next mission comes around makes them unrealistically disposable towards the end of a level - A necessary evil when using characters to keep a plot going.

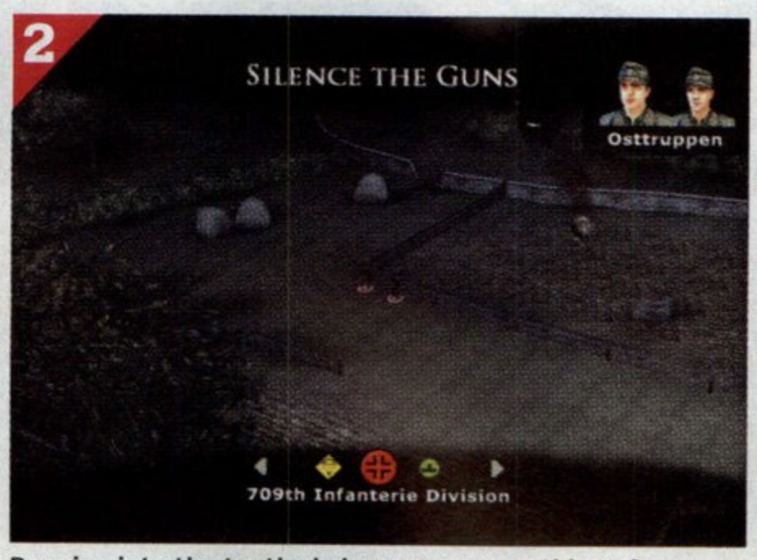
If you're looking to have wartime shooters revolutionised, *Brothers in Arms* is not the game that will champion such a cause. It's not due to a lack of overall

A POINT OF VIEW

Why tactical is practical

Surprisingly, having an 'out of body' experience in the thick of things is very useful.

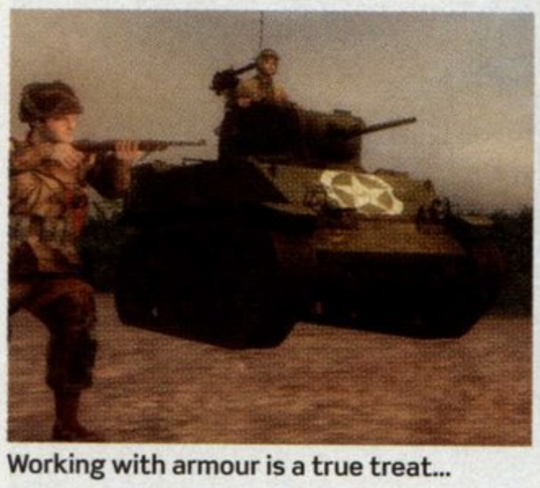
The Sarge has just spotted a couple of German soldiers past those fences, they need to be outflanked.



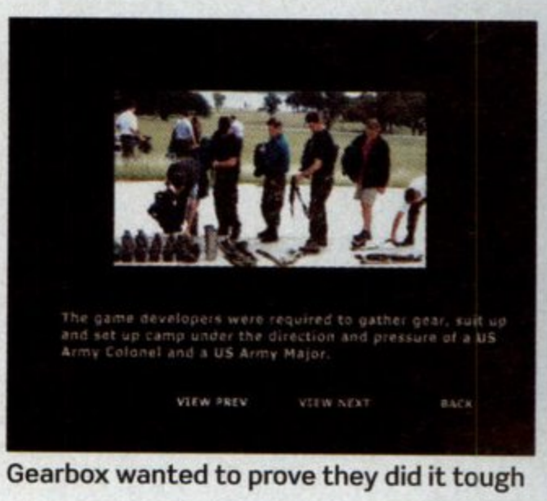
Popping into the tactical view, we can see things from Jerry's perspective. The sarge will move to the hay bails.

While we're popping off caps here, the Germans sit tight, allowing our CO to outflank and kill them from the right.

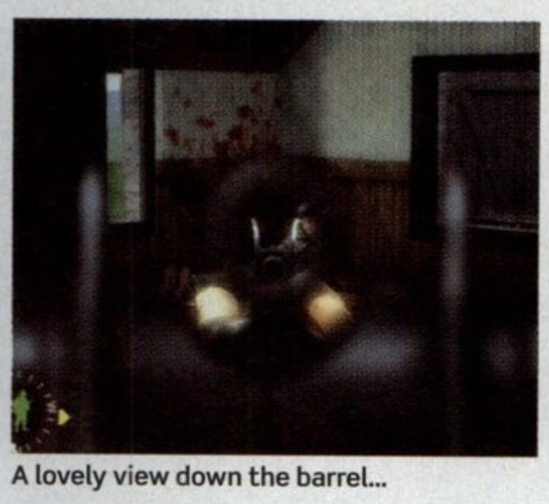
Brave but stupid, advancing in the open is very risky.



Working with armour is a true treat...


The game developers were required to gather gear, suit up and set up camp under the direction and pressure of a US Army Colonel and a US Army Major.
VIEW PREV
VIEW NEXT
BACK

Gearbox wanted to prove they did it tough



A lovely view down the barrel...

Using the German's weapons against them

quality, but rather by the nature of its mechanics – The tactical view that separates it from other shooters simply can't work in multiplayer in real-time. While the maps are decent, and the basic gunplay sound, it's the way the AI works in the single-player game that makes *BIA* special

It also has to be said that while the dynamic tactics and AI are much better here, it will take appreciation of that fact to make the battles feel any more memorable than those from say *Call of Duty*. Though just as intense thanks to some truly frightening moments of being exposed to heavy fire in total pandemonium, the encounters are not as immediately visceral or free-flowing. Finally, for the shallow… Despite how authentic *Road to Hill 30* looks, and how it recreates actually WWII locations faithfully, it simply doesn't deliver as much of a shocking feast for the eyes on a mid or low spec system with a reasonable frame rate. To choose *BIA*, you'd have to be open to a more tactical-FPS feel rather than a daring run-and-gun experience.

At the end of the day, *Brothers in Arms* is a game you should play, even if just to see what can be done integrating tactics into a FPS game without presenting it as a tactical-shooter. The system Gearbox have created highlights how awkward co-ordinating troops in these sorts of games has been until now, and will no doubt inspire other developers to refine the system further. For those who love to lose themselves in military history, enjoy a good FPS challenge, insist on authenticity and appreciate the human side of things, the *Road to Hill 30* is a gaming journey worth taking.

DAN TOOSE

PC GAMES ADDICT An authentic & intelligent WWII FPS

IT'S ›Challenging ›Emotional ›Tactical without being slow

IT'S NOT ›A multiplayer hit ›Smooth as silk › Fluffy

Progressive **87%**

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Ubisoft ■ **Developer** Gearbox ■ **They say** 1 GHz, 512Mb RAM, 32Mb video card ■ **We say** 2.5 GHz, 1Gb RAM, 128Mb video card ■ **Multiplayer** LAN or Internet ■ **Link** www.brothersinarmsgame.com ■ **Influenced by** Call of Duty, Saving Private Ryan ■ **Alternatively** Call of Duty

Review

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

Ze goggles, zhey do nothi- no, wait, they're working perfectly

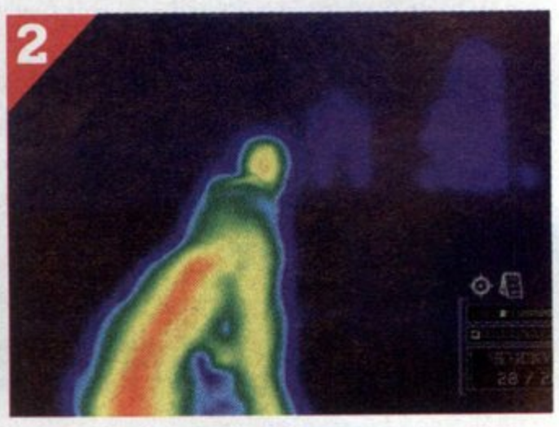
A new stealth move: drag the guard over railings. Ace.

ANATOMY OF A SCENE

How things have changed in the Splinter Cell world

There's more than one way to skin a guard. Let's see what options are available to Sam

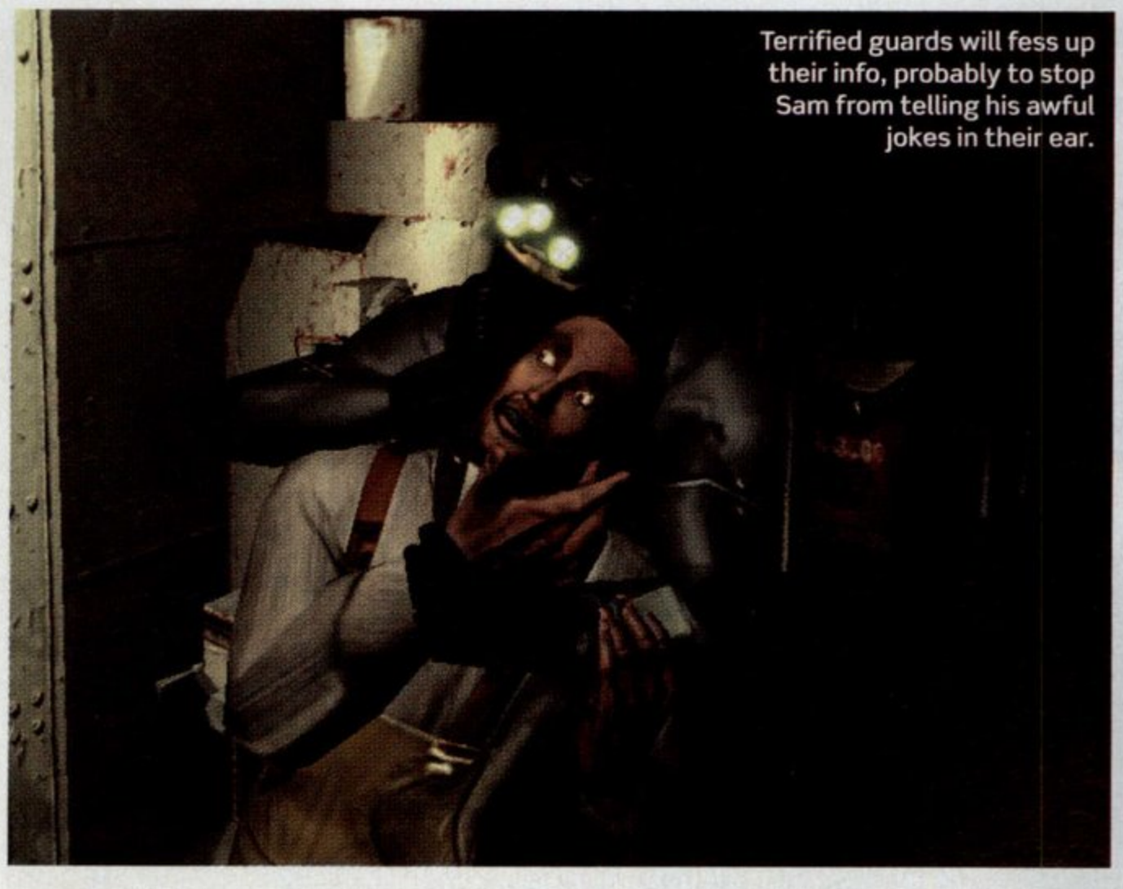
The scene: your target is on the right, talking into his phone. You only have one objective in here: kill him.



The heat signatures show up two more guards to the left. With the automatic rifle you can take them all out in a few seconds.

Or, you could head into the crawl space, listen to the plans being divulged, and wait for the guards to spread through the level.

Ultimately the target is left with one guard. Either you kill him the moment you see him, or wait till he's less protected.



Terrified guards will fess up their info, probably to stop Sam from telling his awful jokes in their ear.

X marks the Sam. An unprotected light source may be pretty, but it gives the game away.

Knocking out a light isn't always a blessed relief. Some guards carry flares and will use them to investigate.

The runaway success of Tom Clancy's multimedia empire is coming under pressure from two different ends of the realism spectrum: increased demand for realism through greater public awareness of current events and an implicit obligation to vet all fiction for political correctness. Clancy's work has always had the cachet of near-future plausibility, yet there is the expectation not to actually point the finger at any person or group that would like to strike out at the free world. Hence the focus on cyber crime, and the deniable, delectably dangerous lure of Sam Fisher's "Fifth Freedom" powers against fifth columnists. People who officially don't exist can kill each other all they like, and if they're wearing black rubber, all the better.

So we turn the clock forward to the year 2007, and find a red storm rising in the waters between China, North Korea and Japan. But get this - the communists may not actually be to blame for the brewing conflict. The Japs have been overclocking their crypto technology, the end result being an excuse for uncle Fisher to skulk about in exciting global hotspots, cracking necks with impunity. It's tough, kid, but it's life.

Thumbnail Review

Superb mix of OTT plotting and wonderful technology.

- [x] Sneak
- [x] Cling
- [x] Snap
- [x] Drums

Chaos Theory refines what's good about the series and does a good job of hiding the faults.

As before, the greatest enemies of this one-man war on terror, this *Splinter Cell*, is PC Conversion Syndrome. While back in the hands of first-world developers, and looking and playing smoother than ever, this port will always feel like a console product. In a lesser game, this would be a flaw, but in *Chaos Theory*, it is a quibble. Built from the ground up with Xbox Live in mind, these modes translate seamlessly into internet gaming bliss. The spy versus spy action of yester-year is now complemented with co-operative play, featuring the kind of close-knit rubbery man-action not normally seen outside the Men's Double Luge event.

The more death-dealing devices, the better.

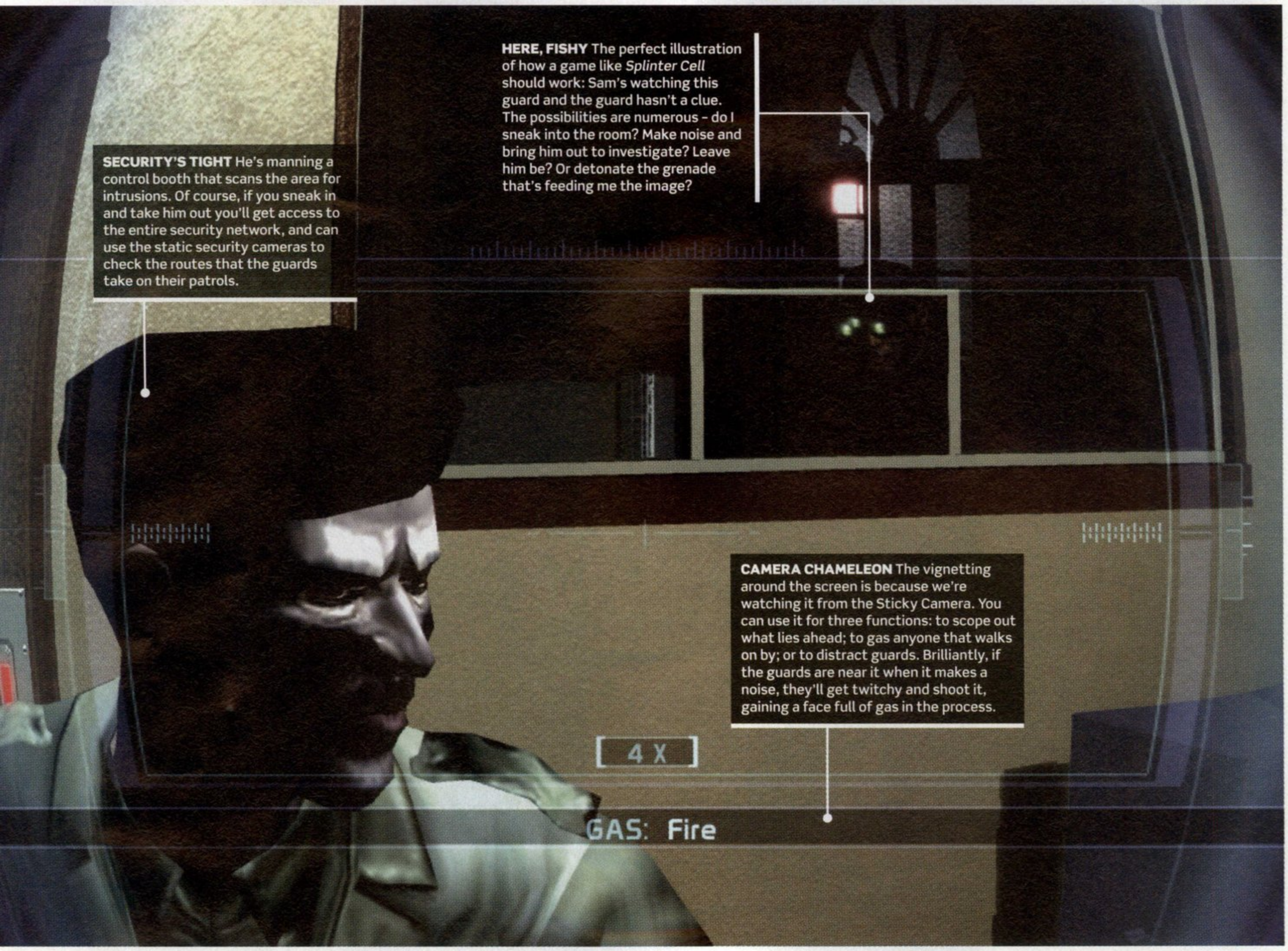
While the plot may be a little off, the gun porn is firing on all cylinders. Sam's personal arsenal is clearly inspired by the new range of FN products, quietly bringing high-power, rifle style ammo self-loading pistols. The latest fad with US special forces is to sling a shotgun attachment under one's assault rifle. Oft called the "master key," Sam uses it more as a "master blaster," but again, we're not complaining. Beyond diminishing your score, there is little consequence for taking life, so the more death-dealing devices, the better.

Spatial awareness flows from those gauche multi-function goggles on Sam's dome, revealing low light, heat and electronic activity. The 40mm grenade launcher still fires fanciful mini-cameras, sticky shockers, and other tools to turn the odds around: less Pac-Man, more Predator.

Gravity is a great weapon, too. Aging yet spry, Sam can still bound between walls to stand splayed in ceiling space, ready to fall straight down on passers-by. One remembers that scene in the '80s Batman film, where Michael Keaton slept suspended by his feet. Mr. Fisher presumably forgoes a mattress, snoozing ▶

TAKEN APART

"Fish-eye for the straight guy"


SECURITY'S TIGHT He's manning a control booth that scans the area for intrusions. Of course, if you sneak in and take him out you'll get access to the entire security network, and can use the static security cameras to check the routes that the guards take on their patrols.
HERE, FISHY The perfect illustration of how a game like Splinter Cell should work: Sam's watching this guard and the guard hasn't a clue. The possibilities are numerous - do I sneak into the room? Make noise and bring him out to investigate? Leave him be? Or detonate the grenade that's feeding me the image?
CAMERA CHAMELEON The vignetting around the screen is because we're watching it from the Sticky Camera. You can use it for three functions: to scope out what lies ahead; to gas anyone that walks on by; or to distract guards. Brilliantly, if the guards are near it when it makes a noise, they'll get twitchy and shoot it, gaining a face full of gas in the process.
4 X
GAS: Fire

whilst wrapped around a ceiling pipe. There are more things to do with guards once grabbed, though once tripped it's unlikely you'll see them next fall - especially if you've just thrown them off a lighthouse.

Through most of the game, there is sufficient flexibility to provide a convincing illusion of freedom of choice, selecting an angle of attack based on need, preference, even whim. Some of the places you'll compromise aren't exactly Fort Knox.

The cyber-miscreants have pressed the fast-forward button to yesterday's security tech; say hello to lasers. Perhaps they were a proud acquisition back in the day, and evil overlords worldwide can't bring themselves to pop down to Bunnings for some motion detectors. It's cliched, but not too gamey - Sam may crack wise about this sort of thing, but at least he doesn't run around hiding in a cardboard box.

He has got a knife, though. It seems a Japanese villain was chosen no so much for plausibility, but so one can make merry by slicing through his paper drywalls. Silent slaughter is great, but this is still just another embellishment, not a day pass to corpse town. Guards can join the dots, noticing forced doors and destroyed equipment, calling for heavily armed help. Yes, you can now bend down from overhead pipes and snap the odd neck. No, dead bodies don't flash and fade away, meaning the ultimate force is sometimes no force at all. It's Zen, oui?

So despite its origins under the telly, this is a Real Game. Ubisoft continue to make wise strategic investments with their flagship franchise, hiring not only real programmers but real voice actors. Poorly used, a celebrity voice is tacky, tasteless, overkill... but Michael Ironside here is doing his best work since *Gotham Knights*. Snatching guards through walls, delivering pure menace through understatement... the only things missing are the cape and pointy ears. Matched with a more abstract score and a slicker Palm style interface, the only failings come from intelligence: that of the player in grasping a situation, and that of the NPCs in surviving theirs. Is a stupid guard less satisfying to kill? Not really.

Splinter Cell has long legs, and with versus and now co-op modes, more excuses to indulge in compulsive behaviour online with grown men. It's the summer of Sam, all year round.

JAMES COTTEE

PC GAMES ADDICT The dark knife returns

IT'S › Convincing › Comprehensive › The best Splinter Cell yet

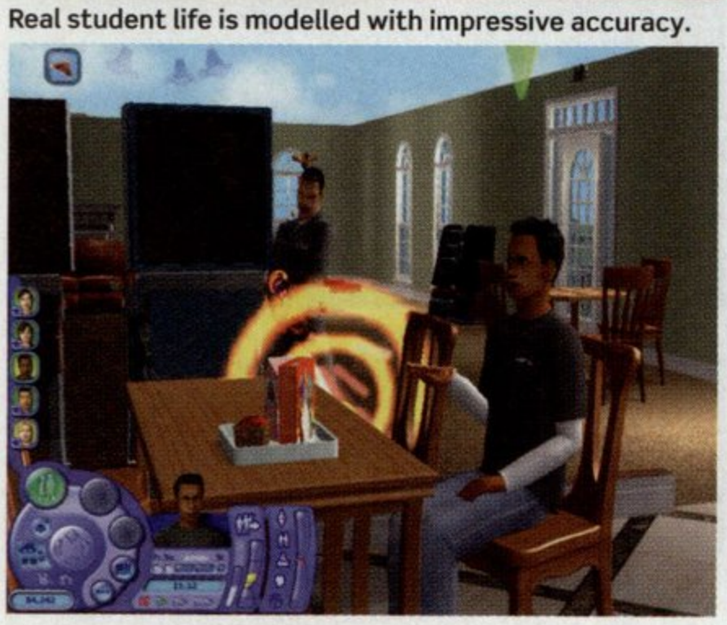
IT'S NOT › Weak › A FPS › That likely to come true

Darkwave

88%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Ubisoft ■ **Developer** Ubisoft Montreal ■ **They say** 2GHz CPU, 512 MB RAM, 128 MB 3D card ■ **We say** 3GHZ CPU, 1GB RAM, 128 MB RAM
■ **Multiplayer** 2-4 players, online ■ **Link** www.splintercell3.com ■ **Community** http://tinyurl.com/4zup8 ■ **Influenced by** Rex Hunt ■ **Alternatively** Thief: Deadly Shadows

Real student life is modelled with impressive accuracy.



SIMS 2 UNIVERSITY

Homework and hormones just don't mix

Eric installs the cheap TV in his dorm and it quickly pays off. The ladies flock around it like sweet-smelling moths to a flame. But all Eric can think about is that exam in an hour. His trouser demons scream for him to abandon academia, but his lecturer's stern words loop endlessly in his head. Life at *The Sims 2 University* is all about making difficult choices.

Offering you a choice of three colleges to bolt onto your existing neighbourhood, this first *The Sims 2* expansion plucks your teenage Sims out of their homes and enrols them on a four-year campus caper. Untied from apron strings, they shed the acne and questionable clobber, sprouting into young adults. Their needs, wants, aspirations and fears become complicated by a couple of fresh devices to micromanage.

The reputation meter measures a Sim's progress up the social ladder, allowing them to influence their fellow students. Perhaps by convincing a fresher to complete that assignment, or persuading that blonde down the landing to snog them. Immediately.

To unlock such Jedi mind tricks, your Sim must assemble an entourage of friends and flings, won over at the campus settings that include coffee shops, libraries and malls. And of course, at those impromptu toga parties back at your frat house.

You'll rub shoulders with llamas, fraternise with the college streaker and busk with your band mates for a few simoleons. The *University* fun factor overflows. But all this frivolity and social climbing can dent your Sim's grades. A second new meter measures academic performance, boosted by sending Sims to class in a healthy state of mind, with burgeoning skills and some completed assignments. (As with adult jobs, we don't get to see this boring part of their lives.) Filling the academic meter *and* your little black book is a formidable task; the familiar *Sims* balancing act, but now more delicate than ever. As always, earning an A-grade while fondling D-cups is the real University Challenge.

Fraternise with the college streaker

Early nights and rigid routines will conquer exams, winning your Sim career choices and two additional 'Want' boxes to ease Aspiration chasing. Roll in at 4am reeking of punch and essence of cheerleader, however, and your Sim will pay the price. Flunk an exam and they must retake a semester, fail again and it's a premature return to Mom and Pop, nursing an extra 'Fear' box to haunt their adult life.

The integration with the base game is smarter than any expansion for the original *Sims*. This is no 'House Party' item pack (although there are 100 new items) or new 'On Holiday' zone that your Sim will tire of visiting. If anything, *University* thickens The *Sims 2* soup a little too much. Often it can become an overwhelming juggle of Sims and their needs, causing your PC and brain to chug under the burden. Particularly when your Sim graduates from their dormitory to a fraternity house, handing you control of the whole household and reacquainting you with the familiar everyday chores.

It's a tad frustrating to come to grips with, especially if you lack the Sims life-coaching skills required to cope but, as in the real world, *University* is an opportunity that's hard to resist. It takes our most malleable Sims, drops them in a winning scenario and presents us with a whirl of opportunity and choice. Choices that are always made with a smile stretched ear to ear, no matter how young Eric's afternoon turns out to be.

MARK SUTHERNS

PC GAMES ADDICT Sims 2: the frenzied formative years

IT'S › A juggling act › Typically wacky › For the Sims hardcore

IT'S NOT › For puny PCs › A cynical cash-in › A four-year Sim holiday

Bratpacked

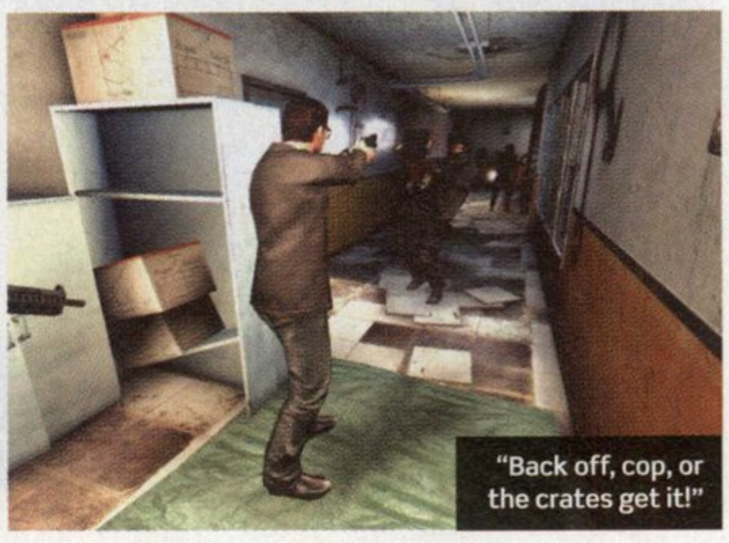
76%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ■ **Developer** Maxis ■ **They say** 800MHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 1.5GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** http://thesims.ea.com ■ **Community** www.thesimsresource.com ■ **Influenced by** Beverley Hills 90210, The OC ■ **Alternatively** Charles Sturt University

SWAT 4

They don't deserve punishment - they deserve GUNISHMENT!

"Sir,nobody makes bricks this big. I smell a trap."


"Back off, cop, or the crates get it!"

SWAT is meticulous. SWAT is cautious. SWAT is trained to a razor's edge. The reality of Special Weapons & Tactics units worldwide is at odds with the loose run-and-gun principals of FPS gaming, yet simulation of their actions has proven to be a solid foundation for PC gaming; a hardcore military simulation made to look accessible. This latest installment proves that some kinds of niche gaming can survive, even when once mighty titles like *Sam & Max* and *Harpoon* get sunk.

To understand the impact the last *SWAT* had on PC gaming, we have to look back to the turn of the century, back when the lads of *Rainbow Six* were trying to save the Sydney Olympics in their first wacky adventure. Compared to Sierra's boys in blue, Tom Clancy's minions were frog-stupid automatons. Even with meticulous way-point instructions they could easily fall to terrorist rabble. *SWAT 3*'s cops were a breed apart from *R6*'s robots. They would move and act intelligently, and get the job done with as much or as little input as you felt the need to give.

Send in the lads and storm what lies beyond.

The world may have caught up with *SWAT*, but it's this reliable friendly AI that still makes missions come together. You lead a five-man squad, made up of two-man teams of Red and Blue, plus yourself. While they can be set to follow you around like a line of rubber-suited MP-5 toting ugly ducklings, it's usually best to divide before conquering. Real-world environments present believable obstacles: multiple entry points, distracting clutter, sniper positions, and numerous doors concealing deadly mysteries.

Yet with patience, practice and an eye for detail, this daunting task soon becomes a delightful exercise in deconstruction. Video feeds from sniper positions give extra angles of perception on the unfolding action. Squad controls are context sensitive; move the mouse over a door, and a tap to the space bar will send in the lads to open it and storm what lies beyond. A right mouse click will bring up more subtle options, like a snoop with the optiwand, or more thorough clearing tools like the distract-a-riffic flash-bang. Make the mistake of watching it go off, and you'll have little choice but to stare at the bleached white

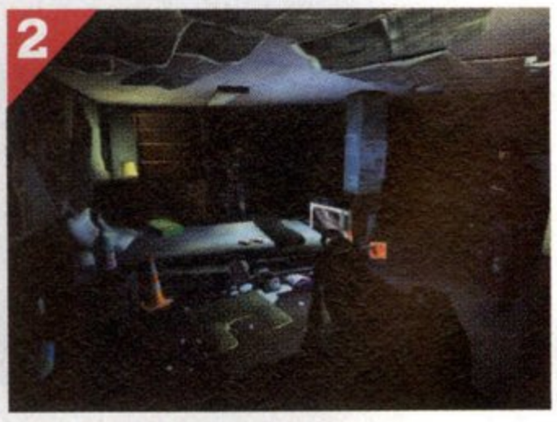
ON THE DISC Take our word for it, or play the *SWAT 4* demo on the CD or DVD > Demos

SWEEP AND CLEAR

We come in peace, shoot to kill!

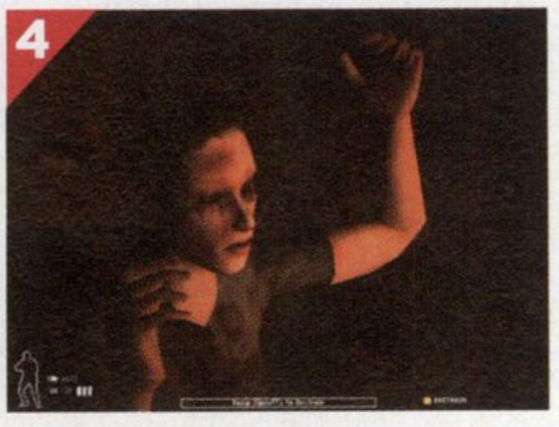
SWAT may have a touchy-feely mission statement, but to save lives, they must first kick heads.

These nut-job commies always live in such unassuming houses. But this civility is a meniscus of lies! Unto the breach!



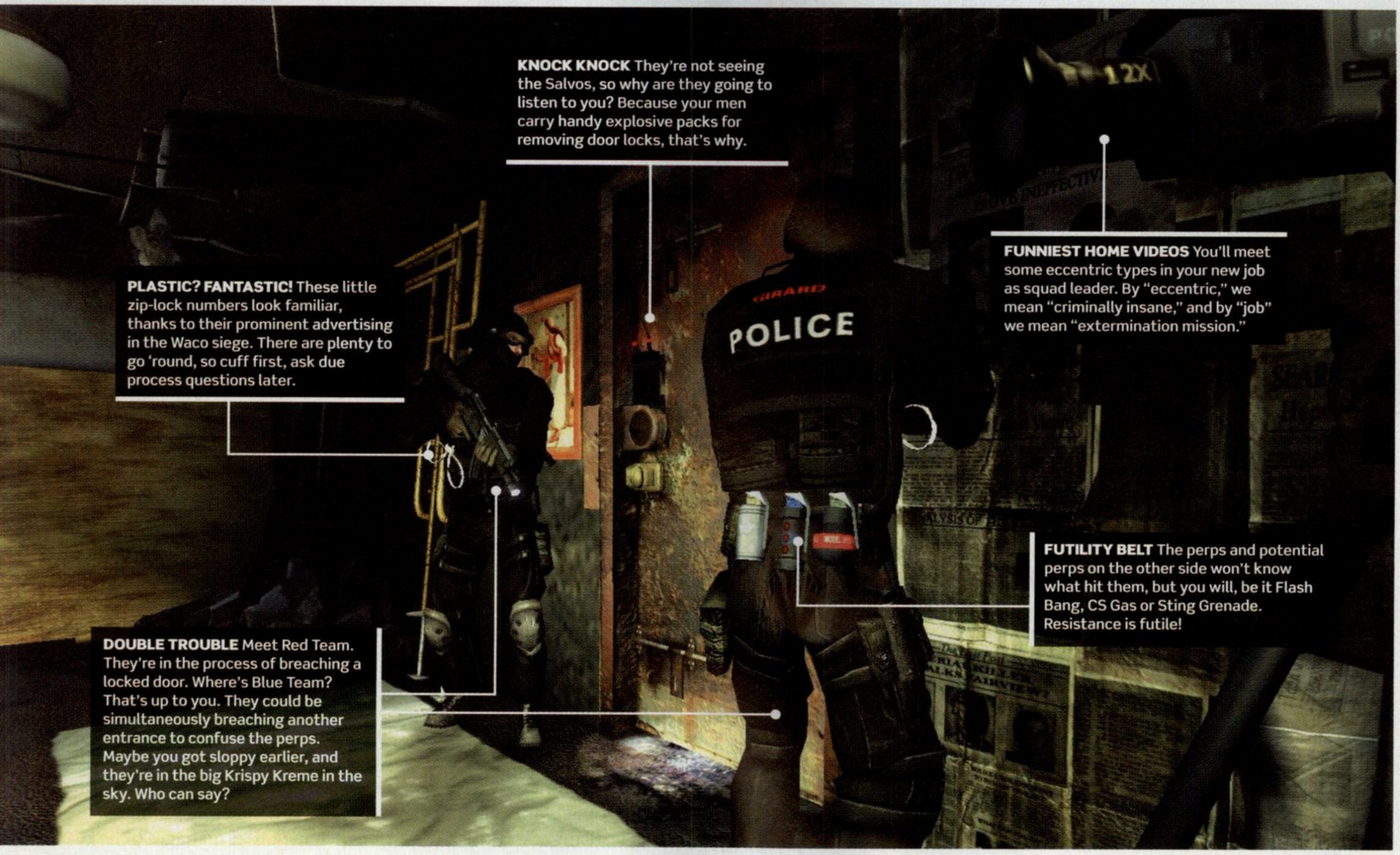
"Okay," you're thinking, "not that different to my room." But that's snuff pron on the telly. Tres un-American!

As you probe deeper, you may wish to divide your forces. Picture-in-picture makes controlling them a breeze.



Finally, you get to rescue the co-ed from the filth-caked dungeon. Don't risk Stockholm Syndrome – cuff her!

"Short, controlled bursts"



KNOCK KNOCK They're not seeing the Salvos, so why are they going to listen to you? Because your men carry handy explosive packs for removing door locks, that's why.

PLASTIC? FANTASTIC! These little zip-lock numbers look familiar, thanks to their prominent advertising in the Waco siege. There are plenty to go 'round, so cuff first, ask due process questions later.

DOUBLE TROUBLE Meet Red Team. They're in the process of breaching a locked door. Where's Blue Team? That's up to you. They could be simultaneously breaching another entrance to confuse the perps. Maybe you got sloppy earlier, and they're in the big Krispy Kreme in the sky. Who can say?

FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS You'll meet some eccentric types in your new job as squad leader. By "eccentric," we mean "criminally insane," and by "job" we mean "extermination mission."

FUTILITY BELT The perps and potential perps on the other side won't know what hit them, but you will, be it Flash Bang, CS Gas or Sting Grenade. Resistance is futile!

screen for the seconds it takes your men (who wisely averted their gaze) to do the job properly.

In fact, you can usually go all the way through a level without firing a shot. Simply by directing Red and Blue - either through your eyes, or over a video link - you can clear room after room, neutralise perp after perp, and intimidate every bystander on the map. Some things you'll definitely want to do yourself, like cuffing everyone with a pulse (never know who's a perp playing possum) and persuading the civilians to settle down. Often they are hysterical, inconsolable and downright rude. It's here that your non-lethal arsenal comes into play, with the gentle hiss of pepper spray smoothing everything over.

Atmosphere driven lighting is expected these days, and is put to good use building tension along with the old standbys of event-triggered music and shouted samples. The profoundly anti-social nature of today's typical siege perp comes to vivid life through Se7en-esque home decorating techniques. Colour and detail are rich, but never too distracting, and we've got to say the crates are some of the best we've seen to date.

Character detail doesn't bear minute examination, but is clear enough for making life-or-death decisions. The deathly pauses as C2 door breaching charges tick away can draw the eye to individual grenades on your compatriots webbing, yet the frantic charge into a room will leave enough time to spot who's holding the AK. The balance across the title is one of realism versus comprehension, and it's one that holds together for the most part. Fully functioned co-op is another potential treat; get four buddies on side and the crims won't know what hit them.

The illusion of tactical rigour is convincing enough, as is the sense of a job well done. It almost seems a shame when you have to blast a perp into the next world, as you've been denied the chance to handcuff every last person on the map. Realism is not absolute - no-one gets called anything stronger than a "Knucklehead" - and a quirky sense of humour seeps in through the edges. See if you can spot the video store standee for Tribes: The Movie . If *SWAT 4* falls down anywhere, it's in becoming a little too straightforward - at least to begin with. These creeps don't know what they've got coming, and therein lies the game.

While an accessible, realistic, comprehensive and engaging SWAT simulation may seem like a minor triumph of unique design in today's pressured PC marketplace, current events could inspire so much more mayhem. If the reverence to (admittedly noble) law enforcers could be skirted, we could go on a world tour, exploring the wacky techniques of some of the world's more, er, colourful police forces. Perhaps such speculative friction is destined for the world of mods. *SWAT* fans will be relieved to know that while the franchise hasn't moved too far forward, it certainly hasn't lost ground. *SWAT 4* is more of the same, and looks better than ever.

JAMES COTTEE

Thumbnail Review

Solid, serviceable sequel to a classic

- ☑ MP5s
- ☑ Flash Bangs
- ☑ Villains
- ☒ Michelle Rodriguez

Not the visionary mega-sequel it could have been, but then, is it ever? A lot more of the same, which is more than enough.

PC GAMES ADDICT Methodical, realistic, gripping

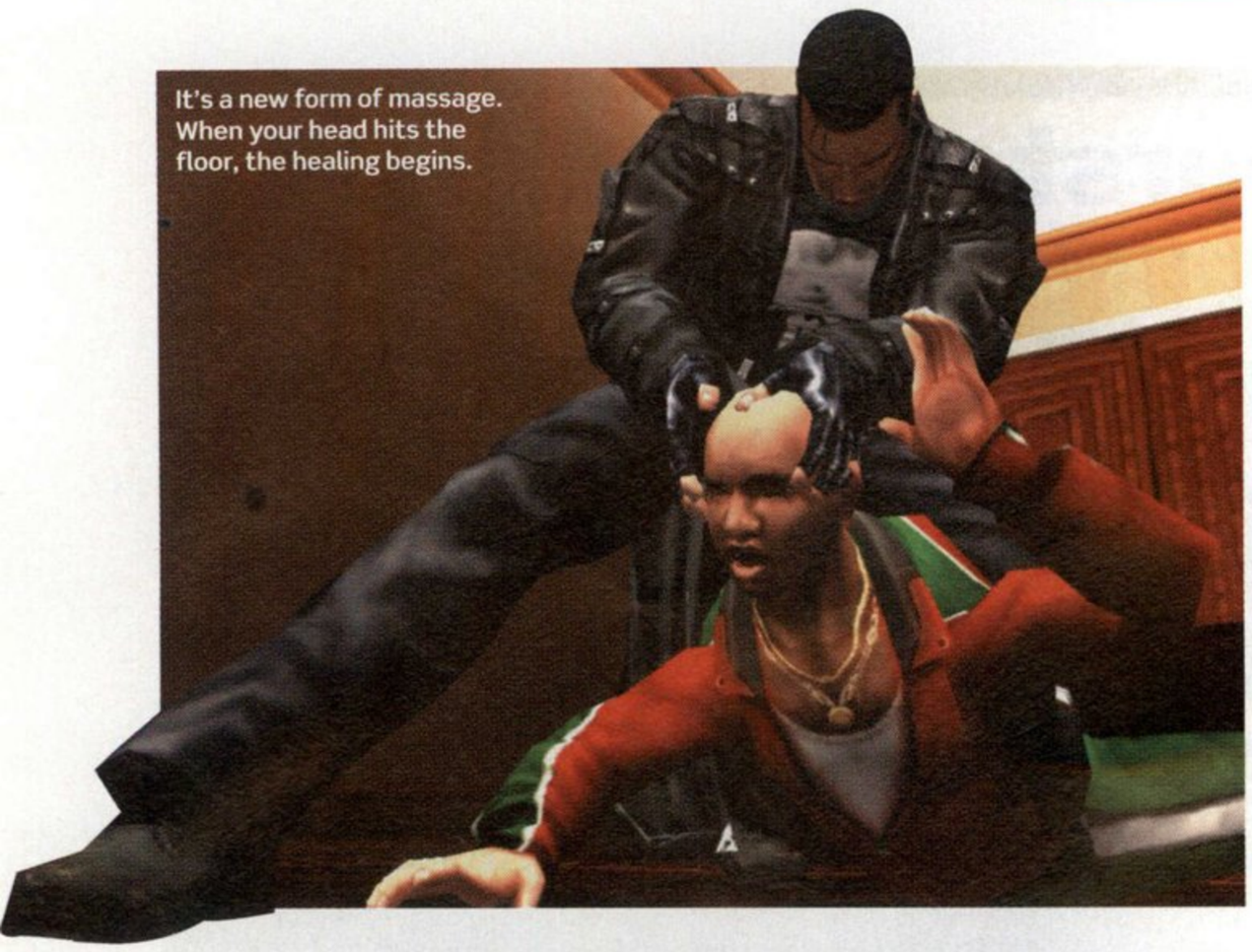
IT'S › Engaging › Compelling › A world unto itself

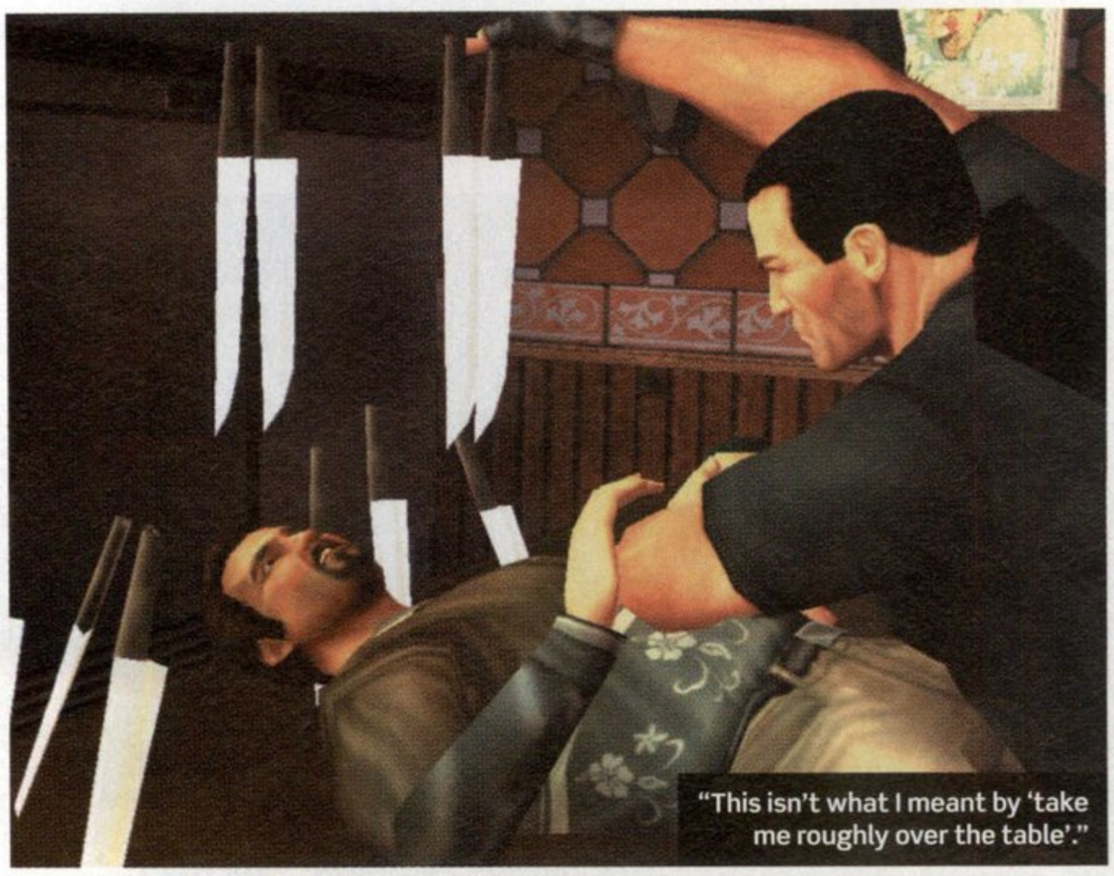
IT'S NOT › Republic Commando › Stupid › Realistic to a fault

Streetwise

82%

■ **Release** April ■ **Publisher** Sierra ■ **Developer** Irrational ■ **They say** 1GHz CPU, 256MB RAM, 32 MB video card ■ **We say** 2.4GHz CPU, 512MB RAM, 128 MB video card ■ **Multiplayer** 1-16, 2-5 co-op ■ **Link** www.swat4.com ■ **Influenced by** SWAT 3, Se7en ■ **Alternatively** GTA Macquarie Fields, Judge Dredd




"This isn't what I meant by 'take me roughly over the table'."

THE PUNISHER

Because sometimes being sent to your room isn't enough

There can be no doubt that the umbrella title of 'superhero' is indeed a broad one. Quite what is heroic about The Punisher is a matter of some debate. A debate which The Punisher would probably cut short by smashing your face off with a breezeblock, after he learned that your library books were overdue.

Poor Frank Castle – life hasn't been especially kind to him. His entire family, from parents to wife and child, murdered by the mafia. Everyone he loved taken from him, everything that gave him a reason to love destroyed. And so, as surely any reasonable ex-cop would, he's made it his life's work to kill every single criminal ever. (A *Daily Telegraph* dream come true.) The game is thankfully based on the comic books, rather than the dreadful film, although Thomas Jane reprises his role as Castle for the voiceover. In fact, the game's story, such as it is, is written by original Punisher authors Ennis and Palmotti.

Thumbnail Review

Comic book misery guts bringing home the Payne

- ☑ Gore
- ☑ Guts
- ☑ Grumpiness
- ☒ Originality

It's a just below reasonable action game, too flawed to receive specific praise.

As you'd expect with third person action, it's all about ploughing your way through room after building after boat after zoo of criminals faced with your vigilante wrath, using an array of weapons that would make Charlton Heston get a funny feeling in his trousers. Unfortunately, it's a bit of a shame that *The Punisher* is only a little more than a poor imitation of *Max Payne*. The comparison is utterly inescapable, right down to a rather weak attempt to recreate bullet-time via 'Slaughter Mode', where the picture goes a bit smeary and things are sort of in slow motion. However, instead of enabling intricately timed attacks thanks to your speeded perception of time, Castle's version swaps his usual arsenal of guns for an infinite number of throwing knives, launched with precision accuracy into the foreheads of anyone nearby, while for some daft reason his health increases, all chorused by echoed voices of his dead family. Sweet.

> A *Daily Telegraph* dream come true

Stood next to its obvious inspiration, *The Punisher* pales in every category. Although, stood next to all the other games that have tried to surf those particular trenchcoat-tails, it manages to be more interesting than most. *The Punisher* at least tries to introduce its own novelty values.

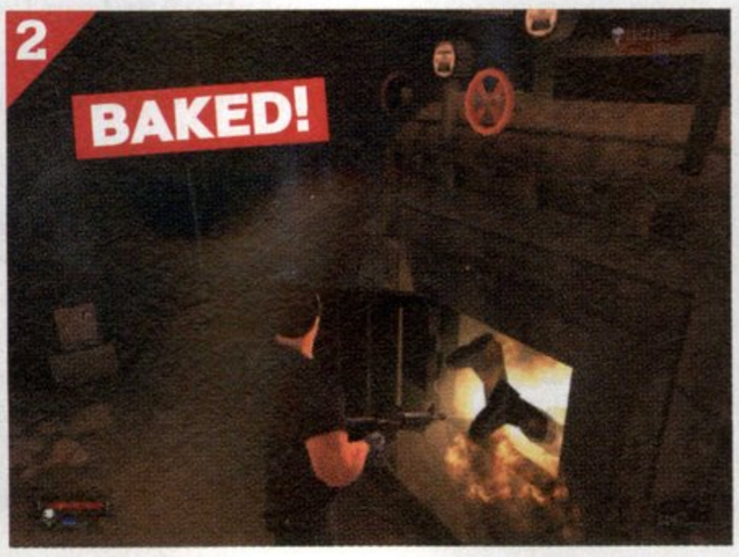
Occasionally, in among the dozens of unconvicted felons you mow down, there will be a fellow with a skull floating above his head. Rather than just bumping him off as usual, you can attempt to squeeze useful information out of your goon by subjecting him to a choice of four different punishments: punching, throttling, squishing his neck

LET'S FIST AGAIN

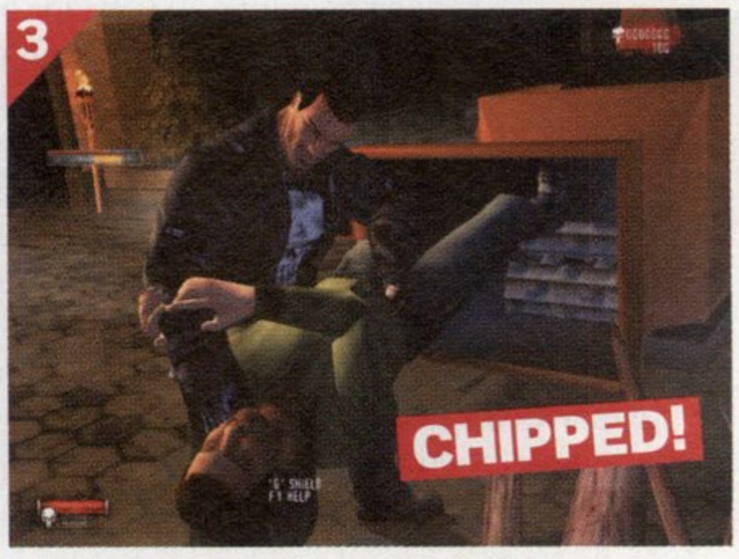
What doesn't kill you makes you stronger

How to lose friends and influence people: a beginners' guide to torture

Toilets are not only a handy source of enough water to drown someone in, but they are also full of other people's poo poo and wee wee. Yuck!

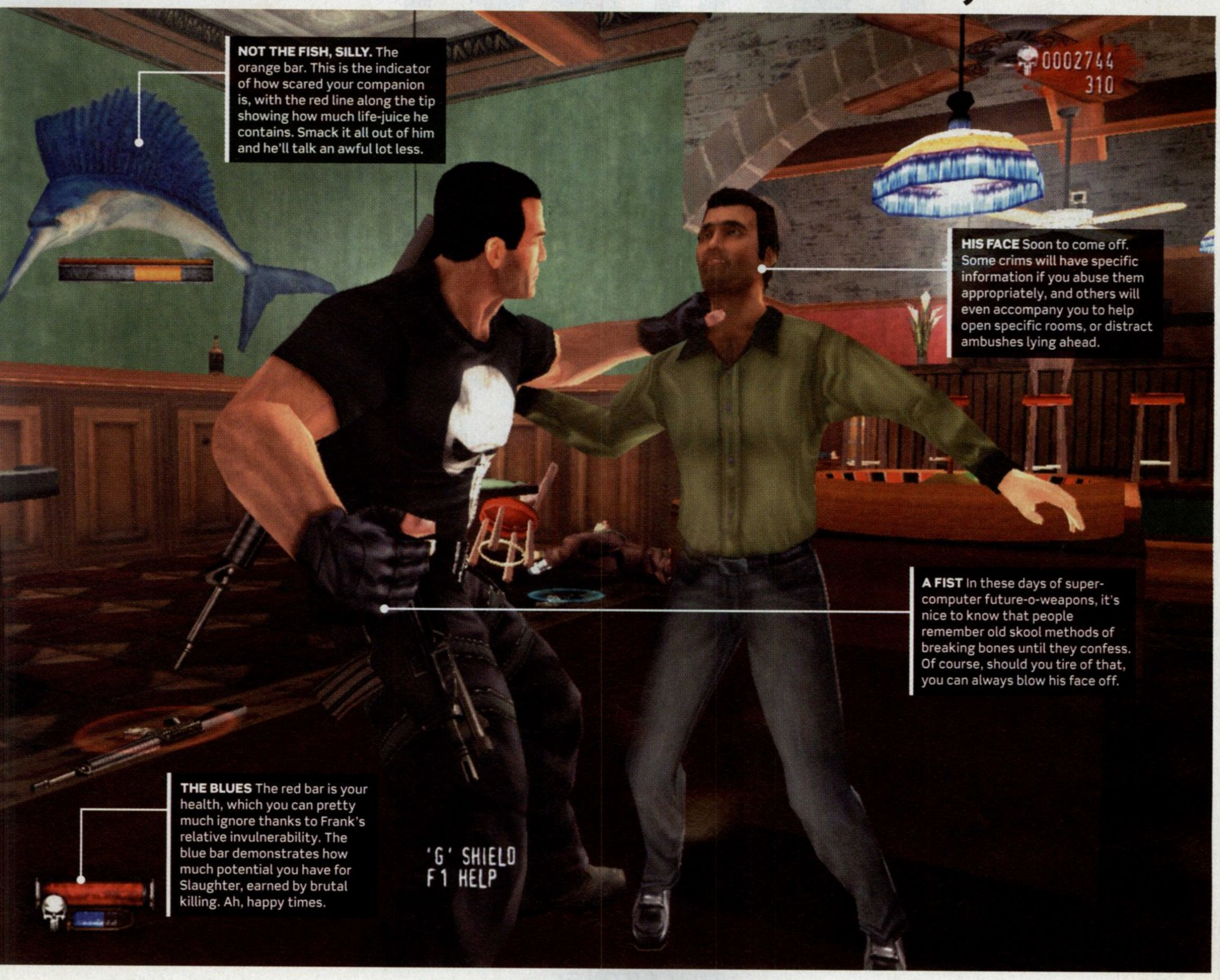


It worked for Hansel and Gretel, and a spot of people cooking can work for you. Although by this stage conversation might be awkward.



If your 'friend' won't tell you the facts right now, then you'll at least be able to make... PULP FICTION! Man, that's a good joke.

"Knuckle sandwich? No thanks, I'm full."



NOT THE FISH, SILLY. The orange bar. This is the indicator of how scared your companion is, with the red line along the tip showing how much life-juice he contains. Smack it all out of him and he'll talk an awful lot less.

HIS FACE Soon to come off. Some crims will have specific information if you abuse them appropriately, and others will even accompany you to help open specific rooms, or distract ambushes lying ahead.

A FIST In these days of super-computer future-o-weapons, it's nice to know that people remember old skool methods of breaking bones until they confess. Of course, should you tire of that, you can always blow his face off.

THE BLUES The red bar is your health, which you can pretty much ignore thanks to Frank's relative invulnerability. The blue bar demonstrates how much potential you have for Slaughter, earned by brutal killing. Ah, happy times.

with a gun, or smashing his face against the ground. These moves are executed by what could loosely be called a mini-game. Using peculiar gestures with the mouse, you attempt to walk the fine line between keeping the victim extremely scared, and just shy of being dead. Get it just right, and he'll squeal. The brutality is then upped a notch by the "Special Interrogation" spots scattered about levels, which offer the opportunity for a more unique approach. This includes 'delights' like feeding people feet first into wood chippers; drilling their heads; and that old favourite, dangling them by one leg out of the window. Obviously these are the moments, along with a generous helping of swearing, that earn the game its adult status. Although thanks to the 'arty' (and anti-climactic) black-and-white death scenes, these sequences avoid the grotesquery of *Manhunt*, while maintaining the extremely anti-heroic tone of the comics. Yes, it's a horribly brutal murder. But no, it isn't glorified. This is Castle, and it's what he does. You choose whether to like it or not.

Fans of the Marvel universe will get all tingly over cameos from the likes of Daredevil, as well as appearances from favourite baddies Kingpin and Bullseye, among others. Fans of intelligent AI, a half-decent story, and impressive graphics will be left somewhat more disappointed. Constantly betraying its Xbox roots, and despite the odd appearance of Havok physics, *The Punisher* looks underwhelming even at its highest settings. And while the baddies will occasionally hide cleverly behind columns, they will equally often stand politely facing a wall while you dig them a new tunnel in the back of their head.

Being a bit too like *Max Payne* isn't necessarily a hindrance, and it's probably this that keeps the game afloat, despite a flat atmosphere and frustratingly repetitive gameplay. And bearing in mind that it's a film tie-in, that it's all right is something of a minor miracle in itself.

JOHN WALKER

PC GAMES ADDICT The first torture-'em-up

IT'S › Brutal › Cross › Slick

IT'S NOT › Grotesque › *Max Payne 3* › Cross enough

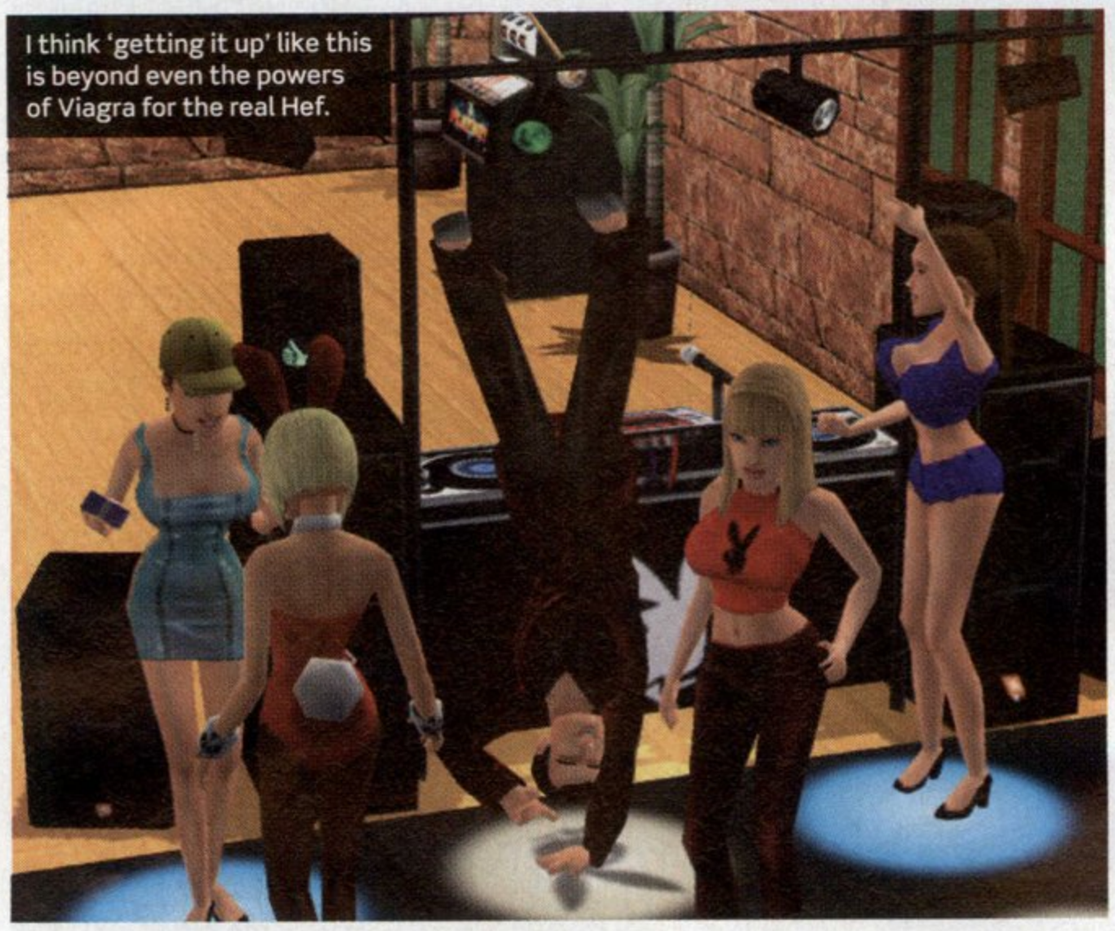
Grounded

65%

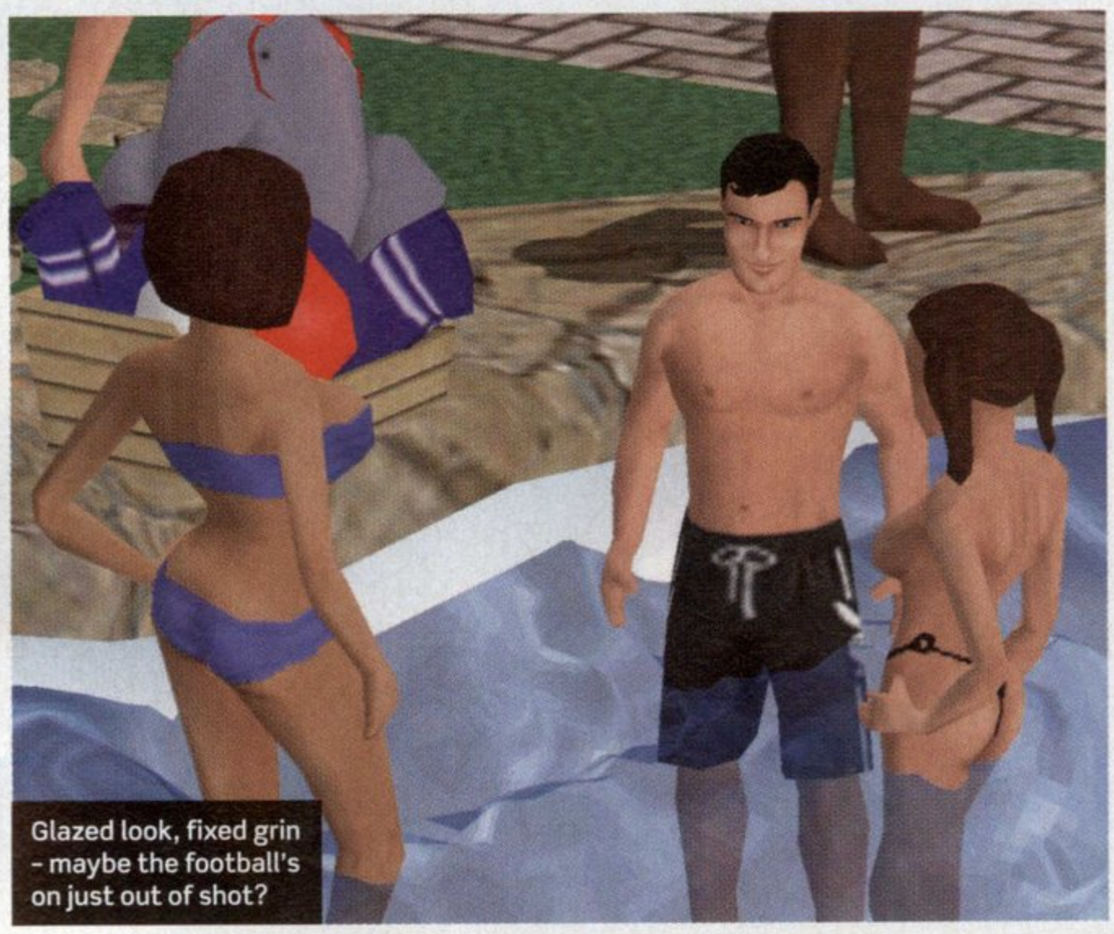
■ **Release** Out Now ■ **Publisher** THQ ■ **Developer** Volition ■ **They say** 1GHz CPU, 128Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** http://thq.com/punisher/the_game/index.php ■ **Influenced by** *Max Payne*, the comic series ■ **Alternatively** *Max Payne 2*

PLAYBOY THE MANSION

The thong remains the same



I think 'getting it up' like this is beyond even the powers of Viagra for the real Hef.



Glazed look, fixed grin – maybe the football's on just out of shot?

You may find yourself in a beautiful house, surrounded by beautiful people. And you may find yourself at the wheel of a large and successful magazine. And you may ask yourself: what am I doing here? And why am I not having any *fun*?

Playboy: The Mansion attempts to blend *The Sims*' people-management with a very basic business system – and some breasts. In this, it's not entirely unsuccessful. You control Hugh Hefner himself, interacting with mansion employees and guests via a simple set of conversation options.

Want to get a celebrity interview into the magazine? Invite the celebrity in question to a party, have a journo standing by and then follow through the conversation options until he's willing. The same goes for articles and Playmate photo shoots. Collect together the six crucial elements and you've got yourself an issue. Match up writers and subjects, photographers and models, and the quality of the finished article is improved. Better content means better sales. (If only.)

Women's faces end up looking very similar

Weirdly, although there's a day/night cycle, there are no deadlines to putting an issue of Playboy together – although it's your only source of income and living the Playboy lifestyle is not a cheap business. In addition to paying bunny/journo salaries, there's a comprehensive array of furniture and equipment to gobble up your cash, not to mention the ability to expand and modify the mansion itself, and open up new areas such as the pool to be used for parties and shoots. Doing all this, though, seems to have little effect on your 'success'.

Alongside a sandbox mode is the Mission Play option which gently leads you through the game's mechanics, introducing features one by one. As you progress, the focus is increasingly on developing and maintaining your relationships in order to get people into your 'inner circle'. To complicate matters, some people won't get on with others, and arguments at parties will reflect badly on you. There's at least some depth here. To attract a truly successful circle of friends you'll need to choose your targets carefully and monitor people's moods. But why? The rewards for such intricate plate-spinning are negligible, besides ticking the mission box and earning a few

Thumbnail Review

Be Hugh Hefner! But not old and wrinkly

- ☑ Boobies
- ☑ Thongs
- ☑ Magazines
- ☒ Deadlines

The Sims stuff is not as good as *The Sims*; the business angle is weak; the smut just silly. Avoid.

VIDA LOCA

Playboy! Playgirl! Superstar DJs? Here we go...

It's not all hot tubs and lubrication, you know. Being a proper Playboy requires hard work

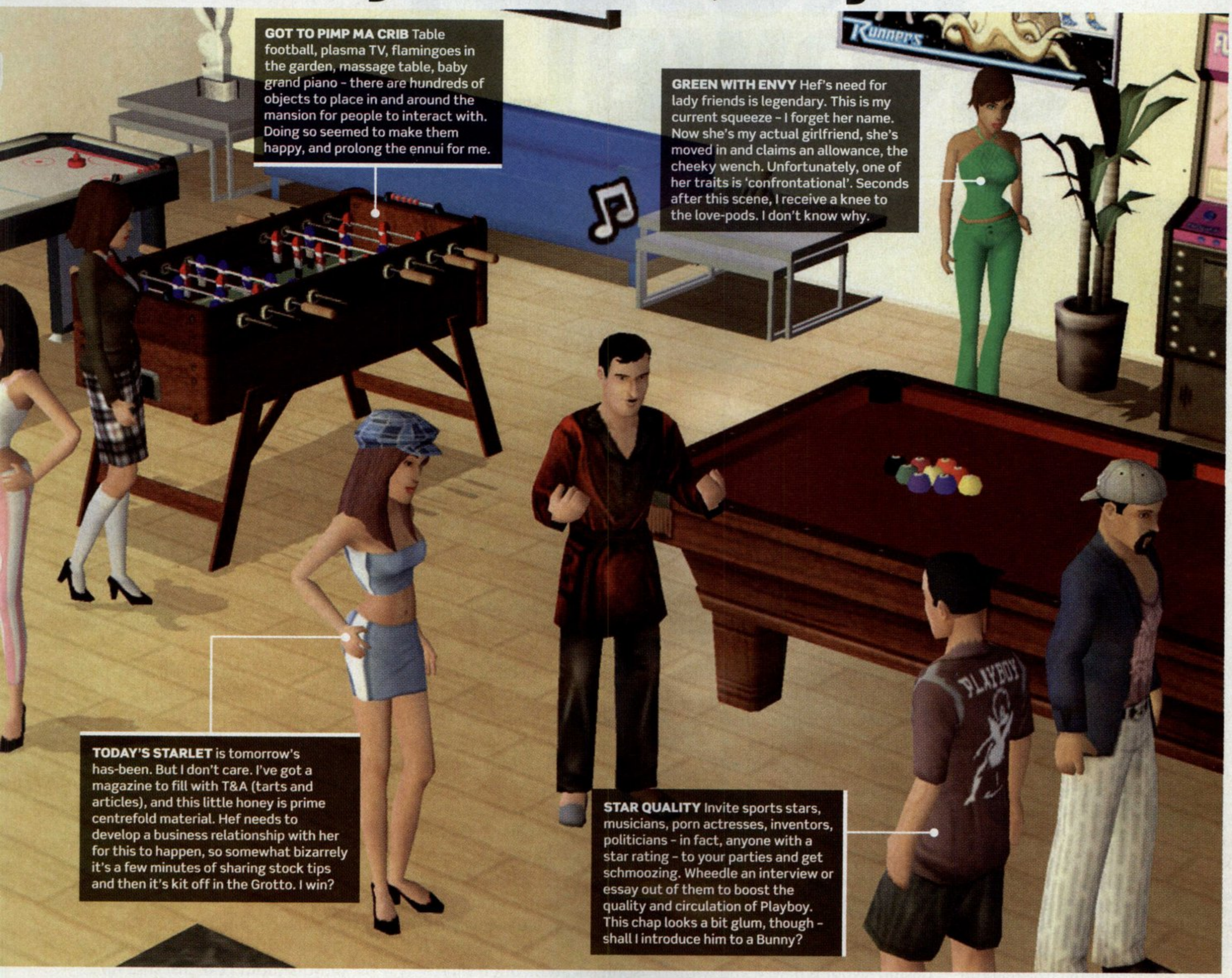
As PC Gamer US would have it, "pimp the funk out of your crib" with a plethora of tasteless items to impress visitors.

Hold parties, but not just for fun: they're key opportunities to schmooze celebs and get them into the mag.

Click on enough romantic options and the ladies can't resist your offer of a partly-clothed romp on the sofa.

You'll need to persuade Playmates to appear on covers and centrefolds, then direct the shoot yourself. Easy, tiger.

"I'll make you famous, baby..."


GOT TO PIMP MA CRIB Table football, plasma TV, flamingoes in the garden, massage table, baby grand piano - there are hundreds of objects to place in and around the mansion for people to interact with. Doing so seemed to make them happy, and prolong the ennui for me.
GREEN WITH ENVY Hef's need for lady friends is legendary. This is my current squeeze - I forget her name. Now she's my actual girlfriend, she's moved in and claims an allowance, the cheeky wench. Unfortunately, one of her traits is 'confrontational'. Seconds after this scene, I receive a knee to the love-pods. I don't know why.
TODAY'S STARLET is tomorrow's has-been. But I don't care. I've got a magazine to fill with T&A (tarts and articles), and this little honey is prime centrefold material. Hef needs to develop a business relationship with her for this to happen, so somewhat bizarrely it's a few minutes of sharing stock tips and then it's kit off in the Grotto. I win?
STAR QUALITY Invite sports stars, musicians, porn actresses, inventors, politicians - in fact, anyone with a star rating - to your parties and get schmoozing. Wheedle an interview or essay out of them to boost the quality and circulation of Playboy. This chap looks a bit glum, though - shall I introduce him to a Bunny?
Runners
PLAYBOY

points, which can be spent on unlocking tasteless cheats or actual Playboy magazine articles.

Further, the game's characters lack personality. Playmates and celebrities come and go regularly, giving you little chance to get to know them. They also don't appear or act in a way that closely reflects their traits, a fault compounded by a poor graphics engine which allows for too little differentiation in appearance. Even in the photoshoot mode, in which models are more, er, rounded, the women's faces end up looking very similar too. You never feel like you're dealing with a person, which I take as a damning indictment of the much-vaunted 'Playboy lifestyle'.

Aside from a few simple graphics options, little attempt has even been made to raise the PC version of *Playboy* to anything resembling *The Sims 2*'s crispness. Its console limitations are also, presumably, the reason you can't have more than ten people at a party. In fact, it looks much more like the original *Sims*, with its blank textures and basic animations. Crash bugs plague the game (it evidently hasn't been tested at above 1024x768 resolution), though a patch has just been released. It just doesn't sit well with Hugh Hefner's ethos of richness, luxury and the finest of everything.

Despite its mission structure and the magazine motif, *Playboy* is a sandbox game. If a game of this type is fun at every level, it doesn't matter if it's ultimately aimless. But *Playboy's* elements just aren't enough fun: the initial thrill of deciding which thong your simpering model will wear on your next cover wears off very quickly, and the core mechanic of relationship management is repetitious and lacks subtlety.

At the heart of the game is a very simple, very cold mechanic. The magazine is the source of cash. To get better content, you need to persuade better people to write and pose for you. To do this, you must exploit your growing celebrity status, inviting people to parties and tediously grinding through repetitive conversation trees to bring them on-side. Parties are meetings, fame is a weapon, women are photo-meat. I feel dirty.

ROSS ATHERTON

PC GAMES ADDICT Stop it, you'll go blind

IT'S › Racy › Repetitious › A bit like *The Sims*

IT'S NOT › Porn › Nice › As good as *The Sims*

Bust

55%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Ubisoft ■ **Developer** Cyberlore ■ **They say** 333MHz CPU, 128Mb RAM ■ **We say** 1.6GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** www.playboythemansion.com ■ **Influenced by** The Sims, Hugh Hefner ■ **Alternatively** The Sims 2, real jazz

Review

PROJECT SNOWBLIND

The sum of all shooters

A little bit of hacking can often avoid this kind of problem.

Robots in disguise! As robots. Or is it a bluff?

Project Snowblind is strange, but in a strangely ordinary way. It's a mystery wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a padded postpak with a smeared postmark. It features all the latest FPS technology – alternate vision modes, a physics gun, vehicles, AI squad mates – but still manages to feel generic. It's great fun to play yet somehow uncompelling once you stop. It's very well-paced and never confusing, but while there are no extreme lows there are no extreme highs, either. This may well be the problem.

Surviving in its world might be too easy (I died maybe six times in the whole game, and half of those were while concentrating on screenshots) but controlling everything not. The default layout is flawed and with primary fire, alt primary fire, secondary fire, melee attacks, augmentation cycling, aug activation and weapons cycling all requiring immediate access it can't afford to be. After a little work with the bindings I found a workable layout, but just as it was starting to feel really comfortable the game ended. Two days' hard play will see this off.

Lines that would do a Sven Hassel novel proud

Snowblind offers action/stealth/hacking alternatives to many situations, lending an air of sophistication, but try just playing in one style and you soon see you've had your cake but are only eating the icing. The augmentations, the Hong Kong stylings, and the publisher, may be very *Deus Ex*, but don't imagine that game's diversity or depth is here. Stealth requires little more than spotting massive airvents and hacking involves saying 'yes' to switching off security systems. *Snowblind* is all about blasting and makes few bones – no pun intended – about it. Indeed, the voice on your inevitable radio link soon says "I'd advise a stealthier approach... or, you know, I can just shut up." And if you don't get that, level names such as 'rampage', 'destroy', 'riot' and 'ambush' make it pretty clear what you're here to do. Still,

Thumbnail Review

All action shooter that surprisingly wants you to care.

- ☑ Physics guns
- ☑ Male bonding
- ☑ Technology
- ☒ Bleeding heart liberals

Play a super-manly cyborg, enjoy regular upgrades, kill folks.

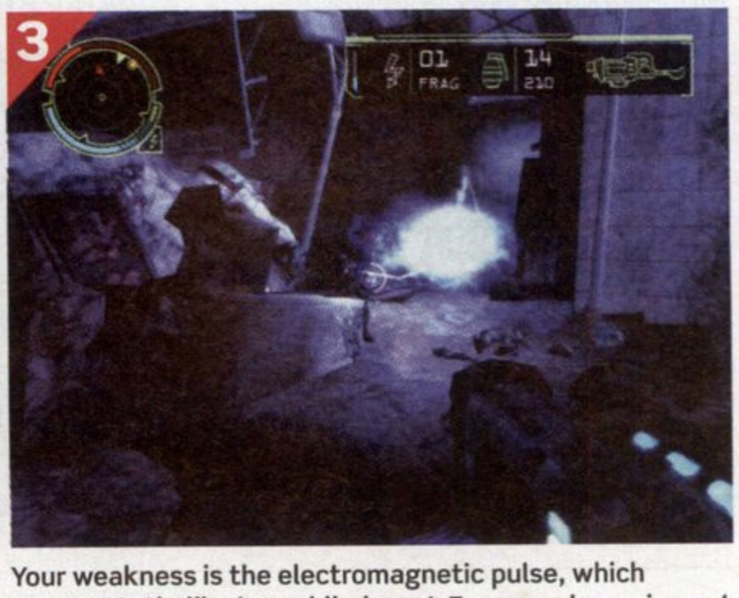
VISION EXPRESS

Your puny barricades are as nought to me

Not even solid walls can stop the angry eyes of a man glowing with bio-tech tricks

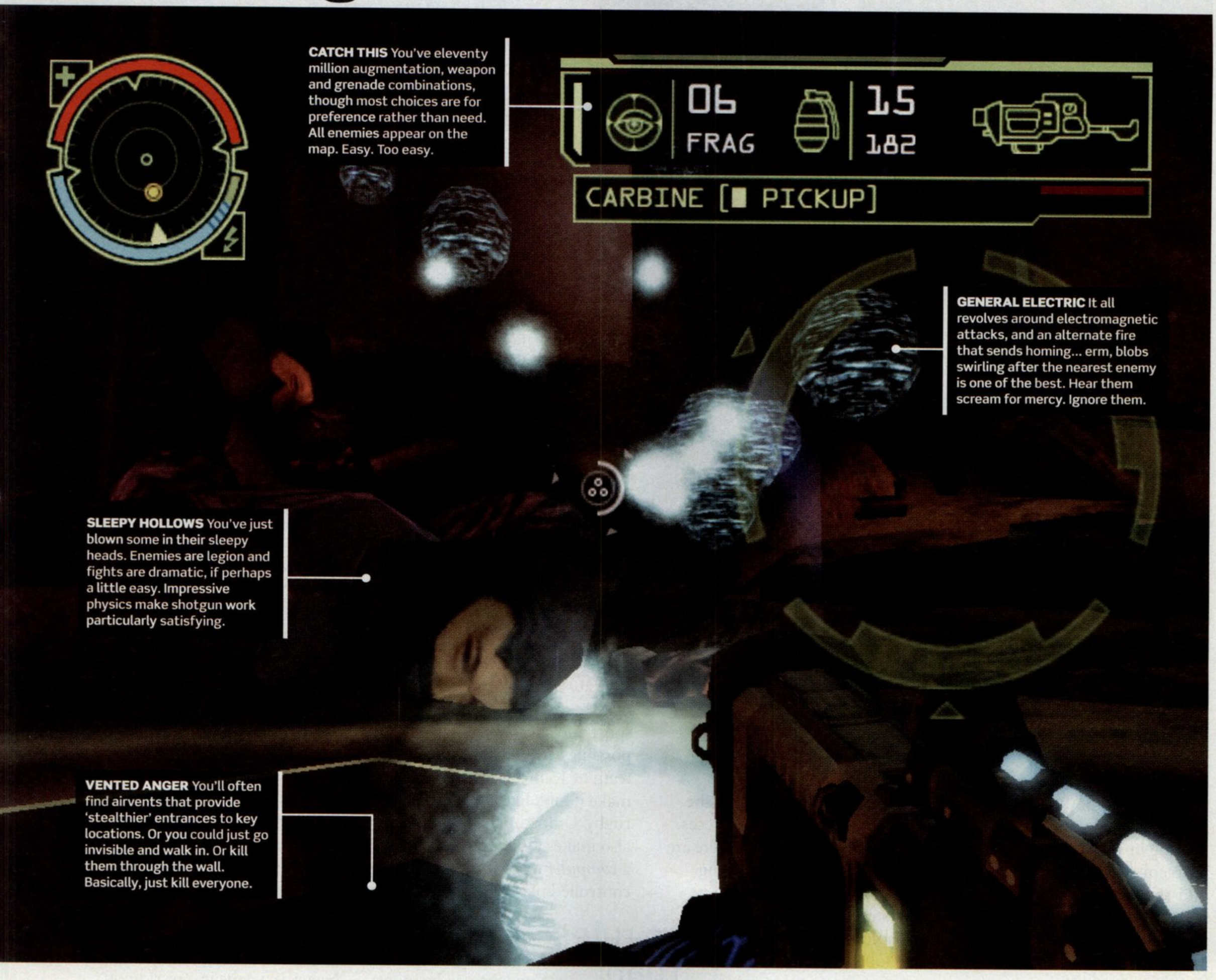
Even invisible enemies re-emerge when shot – cloaking yourself in a forcefield shield renders their weapons useless while you find them. Muhahahaha!

Alternatively, you can use thermal vision to spot them, even from the next room. And once you have the railgun, you can kill them from there too. Muhahahaha!



Your weakness is the electromagnetic pulse, which causes static-like 'snowblindness'. Enemy pulses wipe out your abilities and HUD. Muhahaha – oh.

"How to get ahead in *Snow*-business..."



CATCH THIS You've eleventy million augmentation, weapon and grenade combinations, though most choices are for preference rather than need. All enemies appear on the map. Easy. Too easy.

GENERAL ELECTRIC It all revolves around electromagnetic attacks, and an alternate fire that sends homing... erm, blobs swirling after the nearest enemy is one of the best. Hear them scream for mercy. Ignore them.

SLEEPY HOLLOWS You've just blown some in their sleepy heads. Enemies are legion and fights are dramatic, if perhaps a little easy. Impressive physics make shotgun work particularly satisfying.

VENTED ANGER You'll often find airvents that provide 'stealthier' entrances to key locations. Or you could just go invisible and walk in. Or kill them through the wall. Basically, just kill everyone.

the crawling and hacking diversions are certainly preferable to finding key cards or killing everyone to unlock a door, which is essentially the role they serve.

It never lets up, either. If you're not finding a new weapon you're receiving an ability upgrade – such as invisibility, the power to slow time or a massive electrical attack. There's such a stream of new things to fire you hardly notice the somewhat generic locations of sewers, ruined cities and futuristic bases. Occasionally you get hold of an armed vehicle, too, and they're great fun, but quite why they're so under-used is another oxymoronically pedestrian mystery.

The first battles take place in courtyards, and frequent use of wider spaces helps ameliorate the sensation of being funnelled down corridors – it's linear and none the worse for it. It's also impressively hectic. At times you fight alongside large amounts of your own troops, who happily fail to sprint over shouting "follow Freeman!" and stand moping in the way. Incredible. Attempts to humanise a few of them mostly fail though, but not in a way that annoys – it's quite entertaining watching your grizzled™ leader deliver lines that'd do a Sven Hassel novel proud while waving his robot arm about. Everyone else tends to stand around gruffly declaring their entirely platonic love, admiration and utterly submissive commitment to you, you wonderful man. Such macho bonding makes it all extremely one-dimensional.

So, it's a ten-hour avalanche of weaponry and abilities, but many of them are never vital. It's a little tricky to control at first, but the fighting's not too hard. It's fun but it's not that challenging. It's got the inevitable online multiplayer – which includes the time-slowing aug – but even complete it doesn't show the spark the similiarly-equipped, as-yet-unfinished *F.E.A.R.* does. *Project Snowblind* is solid, chunky and warming – sort of a Heinz Big Soup to other, thinner FPS games, but it's still tinned. Good, then. But not gourmet.

STEVE WILLIAMS

PC GAMES ADDICT Fun while it lasts

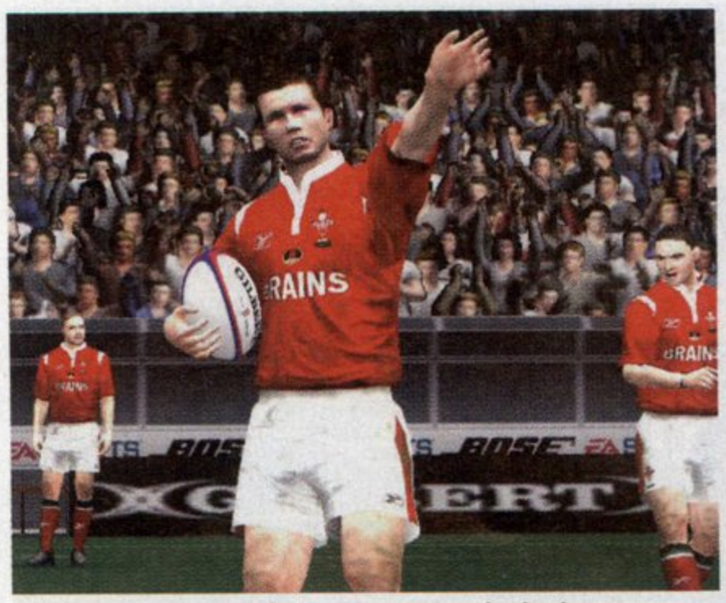
IT'S › Eager › Pretty › Entertaining

IT'S NOT › Difficult › Very long › That memorable

Alwhite

84%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Eidos ■ **Developer** Crystal Dynamics ■ **They say** 933MHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** 16 players, online ■ **Link** www.projectsnowblind.com ■ **Influenced by** Deus Ex, thick novels with explosions on the cover ■ **Alternatively** F.E.A.R



The AI ensures he's about as smart as he looks.

A sudden collapse leads to tragedy at the 25th International Twister Championships.

RUGBY 2005

EA's latest gets stuck at the bottom of another ruck

Rosstradamus time. I hereby make this bold prediction: no one will ever be able to make a really good rugby game. Ice hockey (ten men, puck moving in a flat plane) – no problem. Rugby (30 men, odd-shaped ball, more obscure rules than Communist China) – no chance.

But that shouldn't stop people trying, and nor is it an excuse to do a half-arsed job. *Rugby 2005*, like its predecessor, is badly hamstrung by some basic errors. As a conversion (*Oh, very good* – Ed) of the console versions, the game's visuals disappoint, but the imperfect controls are the main cause of frustration, resulting in conceded penalties and territory, and missed passes. For example, unless the first receiver is *absolutely* ready for the pass from the breakdown, it will sail by and then the *entire* team will sprint *parallel to the ball* as it bobbles into your 22, waiting for it to stop. Gah. If Justin Harrison's rank stupidity makes you ditch things at the screen, then you ain't seen nothing yet.

To be fair, the interface has been considerately coded for keyboard and mouse, with pop-ups reminding you of the crucial keys to use at set-pieces, for example. Trouble is, there are just too many. For a running player to execute a simple sidestep, you need to be holding down all the following keys: space, left cursor, shift and Q. Or W, depending on which way you want to shimmy. And if your timing isn't perfect, which it won't be, because the game's fast and congested and your hands already resemble a pair of amorous spiders, you might as well not bother. A good gamepad makes things only slightly easier, but either way the game's fundamental make-up prevents the sort of exciting, improvised, flowing rugby that fans dream of. Crabbing back and forth across the pitch is not the same thing.

More rules than Communist China

Rugby 2005 actually suffers from many of the things that make rugby so good as a real sport and spectacle. It's just not possible for a player to control a team of 15 in a flowing game and make it look like a real game of rugby. Unfortunately, *Rugby 2005* also makes it seem impossible for a *computer* to do it. The 29 AI controlled players perform excellent impressions of headless chickens if anything unexpected happens; while shifting to the nearest player when in defence is a haphazard business, making tackling nightmarish.

The outlandish Ian Robertson and the more familiar Australian Murray Mexted replace the hapless John Inverdale, and though their delivery is decent the programmers have let them down badly. Ian, would Canada *really* want to "go for the long kick" when they're camped on the five-yard line? At first glance the list of players and teams is impressive, but there are some notable absences: most Premiership teams aren't signed up to the game and neither do EA have the licences for the European or World Cups. Equally, there are plenty of real-world stadia but, beyond a vague impression of surroundings, there's a lack of detail and accuracy.

There's an improvement over the previous version's challenge level, and you'll have to at least try some of the special moves to get the edge on a team at normal difficulty or above. Sadly, elsewhere there is only more evidence that this is EA's worst sports game.

ROSS ATHERTON

PC GAMES ADDICT Professional foul. Must try harder

IT'S ›Fast ›Button-mashing ›Not a patch even on *FIFA*

IT'S NOT ›Convincing ›True eye-candy ›Easy to make a good rugby sim

Drop

49%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Electronic Arts ■ **Developer** In-house ■ **They say** 700MHz CPU, 128Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** Two players, one PC ■ **Link** www.easports.com/games/rugby2005 ■ **Influenced by** The beautiful game ■ **Alternatively** Pro Rugby Manager 2

www.acecombatgame.com

In the sky, there is only one rule: hunt or be hunted.

Ace Combat™: Squadron Leader

fun,
anyone?

PlayStation 2

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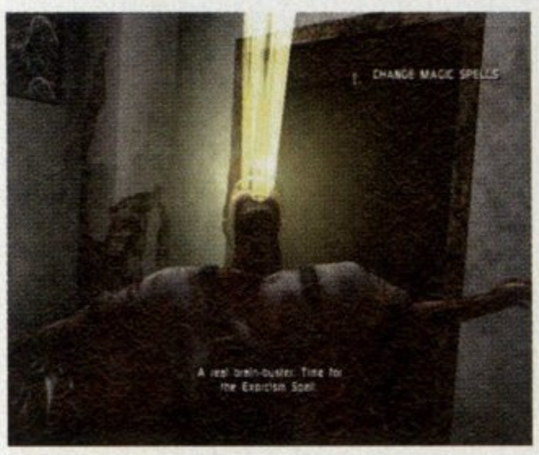
CONSTANTINE

Like Max Payne on Aspirin

The alternative view mode: demo-vision.



The most specific meteor strike, ever.

Exorcism

The medieval flamethrower in action, You'd think inflammability would be a must for a minion of Hell.

You haven't lived until you've cocked the Holy Shotgun. It's a thought whirling through my mind as I rampage through the undead uglies. For all its faults, and there's much wrong, *Constantine* is never short of insane, ugly style.

That's largely due to the rich source material: a series of grim graphic novels (Hellblazer) ripe for plunder, plus the movie adaptation. Constantine is a chain-smoking, demonic detective, haunted by his gift: the ability to see the demons and half-angels that walk the earth. He's also capable of moving between the real world and Hell. It's a fascinating world, but the clumsy fumbling of this third-person action game feels more like paradise lost.

Here's the chaff: the over-the-shoulder angle – done so well in *Max Payne* because there's an athletic, lithe character to control – doesn't work here. Constantine is slow and can't dodge. He's often backed off into a corner and left to shoot his way out. This wouldn't be so much of a problem if the sluggish third-person camera didn't force its way through the back of your skull into first-person mode, when you stand too close to a wall. The sudden lurch in camera angles (and, if you think about it, genres) is completely off-putting.

A series of wonderful-sounding weapons disappoint in practice. Medieval flamethrowers, shotguns and nail guns should feel like they're ripping the beasts of Hell a new hole for the proctologist, yet they're weedy. There's no satisfaction, just a constant sense of 'meh' as the Holy Shotgun sprays its load too wide, or the stakes fired from the stakegun enter their target without a whisper.

Ripping the beasts of Hell a new hole

And those demons: there's really no excuse nowadays for having enemies that see you as the red rag to their bull. It's all head down, here we come nonsense that gets them stuck in doorways and behind tables. This is a horror story with comedy villains. It's hard to be scared of a skinless eyesore when it's tripping over a gurney.

The only wheat is found in the art direction and clever set-pieces. As Constantine delves into Hell, the grim urban environment flames up: gritty red lighting burns in previously dark corners.

I walked into a morgue at one point, the walls lined with those long metal drawers they keep the corpses in. The drawers burst open and the inhabitants took me for a chew toy. Another level began with a PoV shot of a malevolent force speeding its way towards Constantine, Evil Dead style. Closer and closer. Death drawing in for the kill. Until the apparition passes gently straight through Constantine, and keeps going, leaving him to mutter "asshole" to the fading whatever.

That's the tragedy: all the good bits aren't in the game; they're in the setting and the script, and that just doesn't cut it.

CRAIG PEARSON

PC GAMES ADDICT **Great game world, below average**

IT'S ›Slow ›Grim ›Asking for trouble

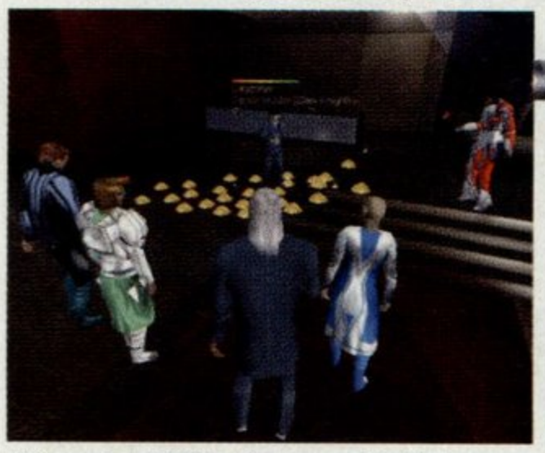
IT'S NOT ›Max Payne ›The comicbook ›Well exorcised

Succubus

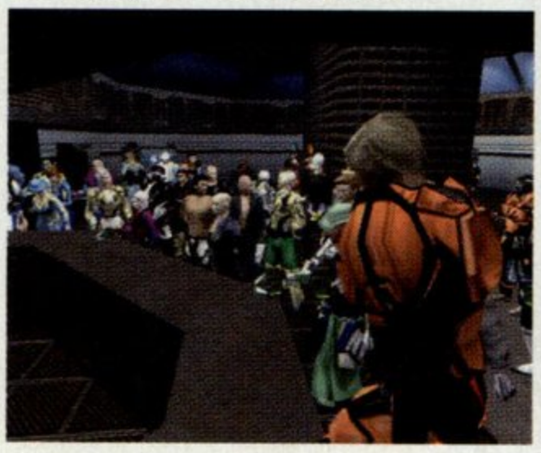
50%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** SCi ■ **Developer** Bits Studios ■ **They say** 2.6GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2.6GHz CPU, 1Gb RAM, 128Mb 3D card ■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** www.constantinethegame.com ■ **Influenced by** Max Payne ■ **Alternatively** Max Payne 2

"Luckily, I had enough left to buy a bra."



"Piles of gold. They're so pretty."



Nice gun? In *Project Entropia*, everyone knows you've spent real money to look this cool.

PROJECT ENTROPIA

For once, you get *exactly* what you pay for

How much would you pay to play an online RPG? Five bucks per month? Fifteen? How about $26,500? Believe it or not, you wouldn't be alone in spending that much. And I'm talking real money, not platinum chips or radioactive quatloos or some other MMORPG currency.

Project Entropia is one of the most ambitious MMORPGs out there, although sadly, public interest is almost entirely in its payment structure rather than its take on alien-bashing. There's no monthly subscription, there's no box to buy. Simply download the client and you can immediately jump onto the planet Calypso and begin seeking your fortune.

The twist is that while most games focus entirely on hunting, mining or whoring yourself out to other players in order to raise enough capital to tool yourself up with weapons or armour packs, *Project Entropia* wants you to buy them with actual, hard cash.

There's a fixed exchange rate of 1 US Dollar to 10 PEDs (*Project Entropia* Dollars – no relation to Disney Dollars). To put this into context, a few of the objects in play at the time of writing included an iron ingot (50 PED), a Starkhov AS-98 gun (115 PED) and, for reasons that apparently made sense to at least 35 bidders, a pair of boots that the game tells us are worth 7.50 PED, but were going for 376 PED. That's right. $37 for a pair of fictional boots. I'll sell you a pair for half that. Here you go. Aren't they nice? Now send your real-world cheque to PC Games Addict Towers, or we'll have them eaten by invisible dragons.

$37 for a pair of fictional boots

This core concept isn't without merit, and true enough, if you make a fortune out there in the digital badlands, you can convert the cash back into real money. The guy who spent $26,500 on an entire *Project Entropia* island hoped he could turn a profit by selling mining and hunting rights; and there is money to be made if you know where to look. Most of your real advancement, however, is likely to take the usual form of working up through the skill levels – until you can break out your credit card for a shiny new gun.

And here we come to the problem. *Project Entropia* is sorely behind the pack when you stop thinking about the millions and millions of virtuabucks you stand to make, and actually sit down to play the game. The engine feels very old, and your actual part in the world extremely small. Even as a completely free MMORPG, it wouldn't be particularly tempting – when you factor in the expectation that you'll probably be paying out on a regular basis to keep your skills and equipment up to snuff, it's hard to work out why you shouldn't just bite the bullet and hand your credit card details over to Blizzard or NCSoft. True, their games aren't going to make you a virtual millionaire – but really, nor is *Entropia*, and overall, you'll have a much better time in MMORPG poverty.

RICHARD COBBETT

PC GAMES ADDICT An outdated attempt at a cash-in

IT'S ›Big ›An interesting idea ›Potentially expensive

IT'S NOT ›Exciting ›For misers ›A free lunch

Capitalist

52%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Mindark ■ **Developer** In-house ■ **They say** 1GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 32Mb 3D card ■ **We say** 2GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 64Mb 3D card
■ **Multiplayer** Massively ■ **Link** www.projectentropia.com ■ **Community** http://entropia-pioneers.kicks-ass.org/phpBB2 ■ **Influenced by** eBay, EverQuest ■ **Alternatively** World of Warcraft

Inevitably, the two characters you're not controlling will just stand around looking confused while you die.

DEMON STONE

Is this what they show on the Fantasy Channel?

There's High Fantasy, there's High and Mighty Fantasy, and then there's So High Up It's Own Backside That It Makes Itself Cough Fantasy. Welcome to the last of the three, where Dungeons & Dragons is reduced to hammering at buttons while swearing at the screen.

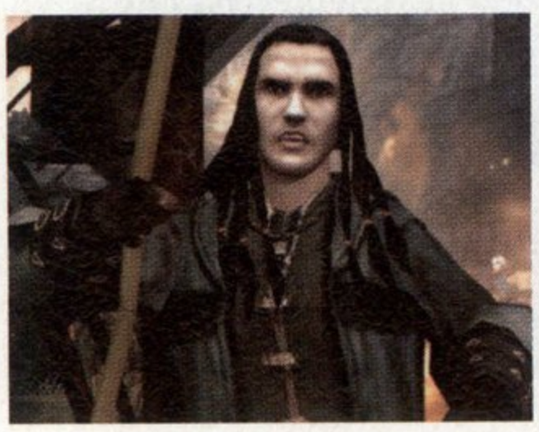
My attitude was initially more positive, which is impressive since this is an Xbox non-conversion: no mouse option for the menu, only really playable on a gamepad, and the framerate falling to pieces above 1024x768. You begin with one of three stereotypical characters, and quickly gain access to all of them: Fighter, Rogue and Sorcerer. Each is given a half-told history in the hope that this will count as personality, and can be controlled at your whim, the computer taking over the other two. And for the first couple of levels this seems fine. Boosted slightly by the ability to level the characters between sections in an RPG fashion and buy new spells, weapons and so on, it's simplistic and unchallenging, but still fine.

It doesn't last. These extras become meaningless as dozens and dozens of the same monsters are thrown at you, cluttering the screen, the camera immoveable, until you're not really sure which of the three characters you're controlling, and certain that you don't care. Just keep hammering three buttons at random and occasionally the special attack when it's charged, and you usually win. Sometimes someone dies because the AI is so thick, and you have to do the entire stinking section again, with the extra punishment of the enforced cutscene *every single time.*

Missing swords, lost beards, and whatever

Patrick Stewart's vocal stylings do little to help. The poor man sounds bored out of his brain as he reads the usual D&D drivel about missing swords, lost beards, and whatever. As he plods through his script, you plod through the levels. Boss fights are disproportionately difficult, while the rest of the game could be played in your sleep. Which it inevitably will be.

JOHN WALKER



PC GAMES

AD&D brawlfest without a soul, poorly ported from the Xbox.

52%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Atari ■ **Developer** Stormfront Studios
■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** www.atari.com/demonstone ■ **Alternatively** Sacred

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2 BATTLE NEXUS

Half shell, will travel

Clumsy third-person platform games are ten-a-penny nowadays, and even sublime experiences like *Prince of Persia* suffer the problems of the genre. Usually, there's something to recommend, some fun to be had, some shred of excitement to behold. But not here. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus* plumbs depths that would give Jacques Cousteau the bends.

You can switch between any of the shell-shaded four in-game, as required. Donatello, being the intelligent one, can unlock doors, Raphael is the muscleman, etc. But the execution of this is ridiculous: in singleplayer mode, where you only ever control a single turtle at a time, that's all you ever see on screen. The character swapping simply magics one member of the group out of thin air, replacing the currently selected character.

Oh, there's more: the camera angle. It's played from an 'on-high looking down' perspective, which makes lining up chops and slices difficult. That wouldn't be so bad if the game had subtle, tactile controls, but *Nexus* shrugs off competence for the devil-worshipping nastiness that is eight-way control, so you have to chop and slice at right angles and diagonals. Huzzah for stupid arcade controls.

Huzzah for stupid arcade controls

So: ugly camera angles and awkward controls. All we need now are enemies that head for you with zombie-like determination, and attack with constant, untactical swipes that knock you over and leave you defenceless. What's that, *Nexus*? You have several different kinds of them? Wonderful.

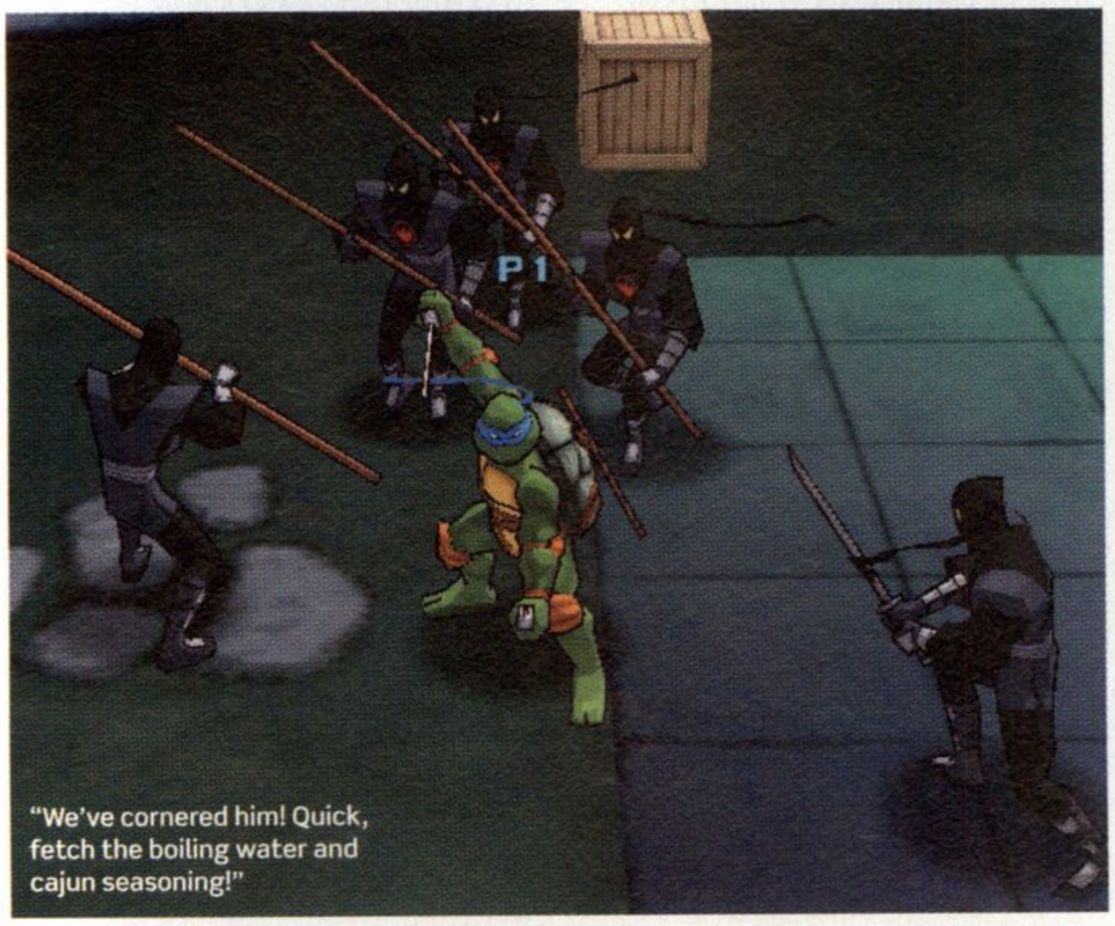
I will say that the original cartoon is well-represented, and that there are some extra collectibles, battle modes and bits and bobs that'll keep you playing if you're enjoying it. Personally, I've got my hands too full of clumsy directions and two-button attacks to clutch at those straws.

CRAIG PEARSON

PC GAMES

Battle Nexus? The nexus of gaming and hell, more like.

20%



"We've cornered him! Quick, fetch the boiling water and cajun seasoning!"

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Konami ■ **Developer** In-house
■ **Multiplayer** 4, LAN ■ **Link** www.konami.com/gs/tmnt2 ■ **Alternatively** PoP: Warrior Within

SEAL OF EVIL

Versus the Dolphin of Love. If only.

Fancy a career change? Well, here's an opportunity for you. You're almost certainly qualified, but here's a simple test. Grasp your nose. Tilt your head back. Now do a Kermit the Frog impression, saying "Oh no! The Qin are invading East Baiyue" or similar. Manage that? Excellent: a future career as a voice-actor for GMX Media awaits.

Seal of Evil has the worst vocal performances I've heard since the leaked *Hellboy* demo, venting the atmosphere of this Chinese-set fantasy RPG in the same way a steamroller would spray red gunk from the carcass of a dog. What life remains is soon squeezed out by the script, which expresses the trite dialogue and scenario ineptly. Put it like this: we're a long way away from *Planescape Torment*.

Spray red gunk from the carcass of a dog

In terms of action, we're in the well-marked territory of *Diablo* – although *Seal*'s small-squad dynamic might make the similarly eastern-themed clone *Throne of Darkness* a better reference point. The pace is slow enough to make the management of your team entirely feasible, with judicious use of Pause to allow you to hone your tactics. Possibly a good thing, but enemies, even at the beginning, take a laboriously long time for your heroes to despatch, leading to a lot of finger-twiddling. The AI is embarrassing, walls causing immense confusion for all parties. The few plus points, such as characters you're not controlling actively retaliating – are taken away by their corresponding negatives – ie, characters are so pro-active they run into an encounter you'd really rather avoid. Put it like this: we're a long way from *Diablo II*.

Not that it's entirely without merit or interest. There's the item system, which gives considerable power to the player to create their own spangly doo-dahs. Except they don't really explain it very well, forcing the player to guess. OK, I was lying about that 'merit' and 'interest' thing.

Put it like this: we're a long way from good points.

KIERON GILLEN

PC GAMES ADDICT

Fails to meet the standard of games that are over five years old.

37%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** GMX Media ■ **Developer** Object Software
■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** www.gmxmedia.net/soe/ ■ **Alternatively** Diablo II

LEMONY SNICKET'S A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS

Jim Carrey playing an awful actor? Never...

Just stop it. Please. The release of your latest family blockbuster does not always have to mean an accompanying substandard game. Don't you have any idea how much pain you're causing? How children across the world are going to eagerly run to their PCs, wide-eyed and vibrating with excitement, only to be bludgeoned by the reality of games without fun? That they're playing a generic third-person platform puzzler? Yes, yes, I know it's not *that* bad, but it certainly isn't *good* and the only things that stop anyone from breezing through it in about five hours are a few grating jump puzzles, a handful of well-hidden levers and an impressive array of bugs. The digital variety.

Wide-eyed and vibrating with excitement

You know, to start with I really thought you'd changed. There was some promising stuff at the start. It's nice that the game teaches you words. I like the idea of kids using 'panjandrum', 'ephemeral' and 'deflagrate' in everyday conversation. The sections where you control the third and youngest sibling are pleasingly different, although I should point out that using a baby to chew through ropes and collect items on the other side of small gaps is flagrant child abuse.

There are a few decent puzzles and setpieces, but using them over and over and OVER again has no other explanation but laziness. Or do you think it's just as tricky and entertaining finding a switch hidden behind a painting for the *fiftieth time*? Because, hey, you know what? I don't.

And while I'm having a go at you, what's going on with those environments? What sort of masochist designs a library where books can only be reached by flipping switches nine feet off the ground, standing on a circular part of the floor, climbing bookshelves, going up and down elevators and then leaping across extendable bridges? Rubbish.

QUINTIN SMITH

PC GAMES ADDICT

A sneeze. Short, with lots of bugs and a few juicy bits in it.

58%

■ **Release** Out now ■ **Publisher** Activision ■ **Developer** KnowWonder
■ **Multiplayer** None ■ **Link** www.activision.com ■ **Alternatively** PoP: The Warrior Within

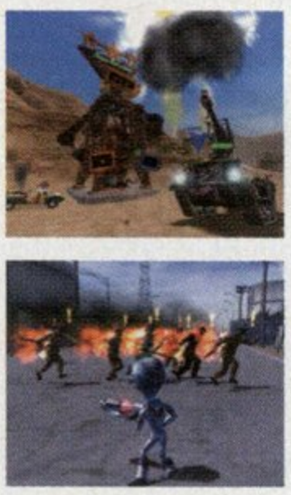
THE FINEST GAMING FREEBIES AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

CELEB

HI, I'M A GAME DEVELOPER

Name Charlie Cleveland
Credits *Half-Life: Natural Selection*
My fave game: *Mortal Kombat: Deception* on Xbox Live. I've played every *MK* religiously since the first, and this seems to be the best. It's the first game where I actually need as much competition as I can find.

My fave mod: The only mods that have gotten my attention recently are *Alien Swarm* and *Clone Bandits*, both for *UT2004*.



The thing I'm most looking forward to: Pandemic's *Destroy All Humans!* Playing a Roswell-esque alien and blowing up stereotypical Yanks.

MOD

HL 2 Substance

Gordon's alive? Not for long

When you go back to City 17, and you will, there's a new challenge waiting. *Substance* is a singleplayer mod that cuts open Valve's storyline and performs an excitement-enlargement operation. The result is a big busty *Half-Life 2* that will put your eyes out at five paces.

The mod adds NPCs and enemies to each level, ensuring there's a battle rumbling around every corner, then gives you a squad and more powerful weaponry to help you cope.

It starts from the moment you alight at the City 17 station. Combine numbers are doubled, two of them sinking rounds into a pair of Vortigon as you watch. Striders harass you on the tenement run.

Then there's Ravenholm: the shanty town of shambling zombies. You know you're in it deep when look at the squad member provided to help you out, and realise you can see the fear in her eyes. The original Ravenholm was a *Half-Life 2* nightmare level, but it's a restless night on the caffeine compared to the stuff *Substance* will throw at you.

DOWN LOADER
Half-Life 2 mod targets our senses for another bashing

The infestations of striders, antlions and zombies will tax your PC, so you will need a decent system to muster a playable framerate. Plus some of the levels do take a while to load now. You can cut down on the wait time, however, by copying your *HL2* maps folder into the *Substance* directory and doing the same with your soundcache files. Tweak your settings and keep your impatience in check: *Substance* is a steroid-stuffed *Half-Life 2* that's being enhanced week on week. Not to be missed.

PC GAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

114Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.daviborl.com/HL2_Substance
Discs	On the DVD
Requires	*Half-Life 2*
This is Class A gaming	

LET US SPEND YOUR BANDWIDTH

Use the Download Manager to judge download speed, or find the best gaming picks of the month on the DVD.

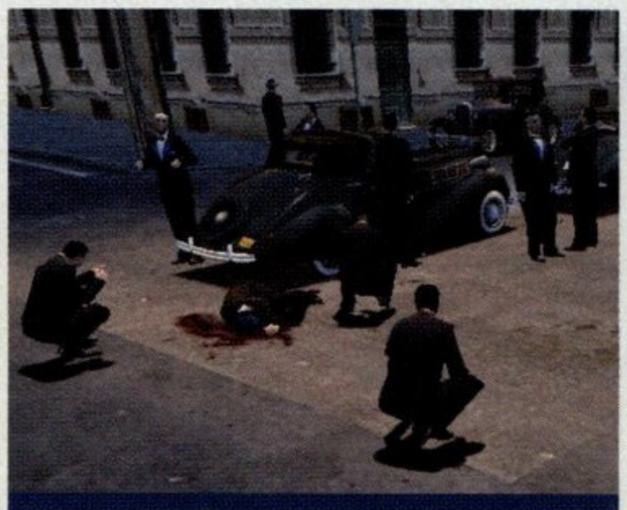
BROADBAND BREEZE ‹ › BROADBAND BREAKER

10Mb	50Mb	150Mb	1Gb
56k friendly	*Modem mare*	*Modem meltdown*	*Nightie night*

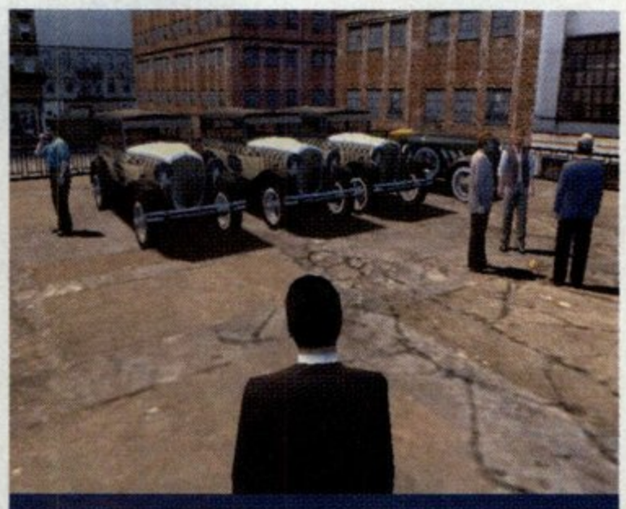
MAFIA MOD

City of Lost Dreams

Street dreams are made of this



Kill mobsters for cash, instead of the usual fun, in *Mafia*'s Free Ride mode.



Visit the Taxi Guy to buy a taxi, and to unlock the racing in downtown Hoboken.

Not every mod can boast a chauffeur-driven tour around its finer features. Kill the three hitmen shooting at you when *CoLD* starts, cross town, and you'll find a yellow taxi cab waiting outside Salieri's Bar. Hop in, choose a destination, and let your chauffeur do the rest. Quite possibly ramming every second car on the street in the process, before hitting a lamp post and killing you. Hey, it's a work in progress, OK? Just think of it as a scenic taxi ride with Travis Bickle.

New vehicles include everything from ice-cream vans to monstrous sports cars. New features include various shady characters who can sell you cars and dynamite, plus illegal downtown racing that you can bet on. Each further release will include new missions, but because the action takes place after the events in *Mafia*, you do need all your saved games to play *Lost Dreams*. Deleted yours? Download them from **www.mafia-game.com**.

PC GAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

16Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	http://cold.lostheaven.co.uk
Discs	On the Discs
Requires	Mafia unpatched, all saved games
Promising stuff, but it's early days yet	

Good Point

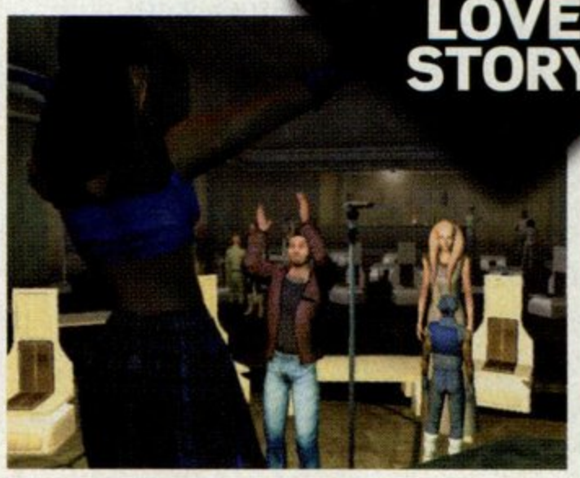
Point Defence Systems for *Homeworld 2* is a high concept mod that reworks Relic's 3D space RTS into a full space-navy war sim. There are new ships, but the emphasis is on the scale and importance of your battles, through the introduction of new layers of complexity. Weapons and defence systems are overhauled to consider specific ship strengths and weaknesses, the damage model is expanded to take into account the effect of explosions on nearby craft. There's much more, but you need to fight your first *PDS* space war before you can really appreciate everything that's gone into this project. Grab the latest version at **www.penguin-mayhem.net/pds**.

MACHINIMA

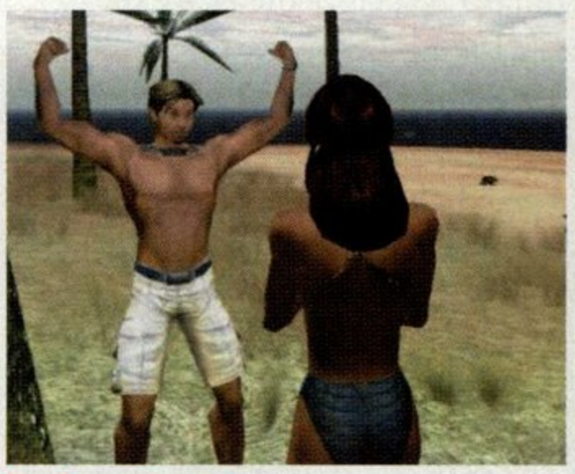
FALLEN

Why should I download it? It's the movie that saw off PCGA favourite Fetts Vette in the recent *Star Wars Galaxies* machinima contest. A touching music video that tells a tale of star-crossed lovers.

DOWN LOADER LOVE STORY



1 SWEET MUSIC
Our lovers meet at the local theatre. She's strutting her stuff. He's in dreamland.



2 FLEXING
The romance blossoms. How can a girl resist such shapely polygons?

3 DEATH WARRANT
The Imperials have put a price on our hero's head. Will our heroine stay loyal?

4 RELEASE ME
She spares his life but their paths in this galaxy must never cross again. Unless....

PC GAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

32Mb

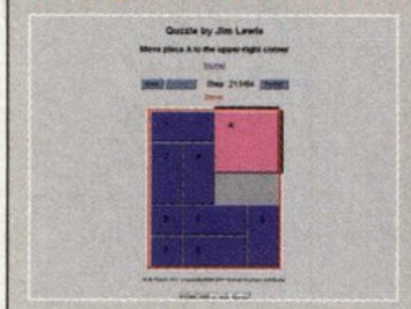
DATA FLOW

Link	http://swg.atomicspacekitty.com
Discs	Not with the copyright soundtrack
Requires	Windows Media Player
The soft gooey side of the Force	

FILE DUMP

Light Bytes

Tony Ellis: sticking a savaloy in the online batter



QUZZLE

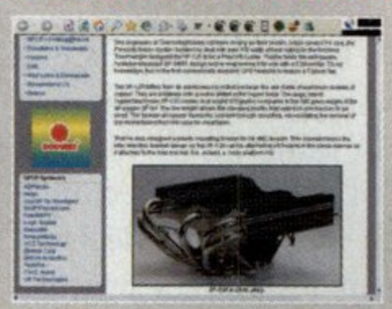
If you want to make a puzzle hard, you don't design it at all. You design a program to work out what the absolute, hardest possible puzzle would be, then make that. *Quzzle* is the result of just such a program – the 'hardest possible' quality refers to the minimum number of moves to complete it, and how many possible configurations it has. Of course, our slow-witted Disc Editor knew none of this as he slaved away at it over two months. Then, today, he solved it – 127 moves late, but he did it. Give it a try yourself. You can't be as bad as Tom.

www.puzzleworld.org/SlidingBlockPuzzles/quzzle.htm

THE INTERACTIVE FICTION ARCHIVE

What does the term 'text adventure' suggest to you? If it suggests mindlessly typing verbs until you find the right one to solve the puzzle, try this: thinking for yourself. Try not just parroting the same, dated stereotype because it's safer than daring to form an opinion of your own. Try some home-made text adventures that are not only great games in their own right, but stories that deconstruct their own narrative as you play them, and mess with your head in unsettling ways ordinary fiction can never hope to achieve. Try this:

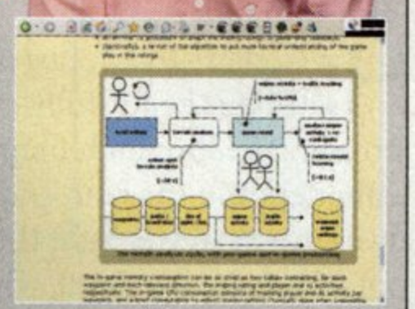
www.ifarchive.org



HUSH NOW

Formerly considered cool, overclocking long ago became the province of people who 20 years back would have found CB radio exciting. Making your PC *silent* is the new PC-hacking underground. Why put up with a PC that hums and whirs while you stealth your way around the scariest bits of *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, just because some hardware manufacturer was too cheap to put in a bigger fan? On SilentPCReview they stick it to The Man, evaluating the latest whisper-quiet enormo-fans, and heatsinks with more surface area than Brazil.

www.silentpcreview.com



GAMASUTRA

Are you merely interested in playing games, or are you interested in *games*? If your answer is "Stop asking stupid rhetorical questions," visit GamaSutra, the site written by games developers and for games developers, yet quite mind-bogglingly fascinating to the rest of us. No pretentious games journalism here, just postmortems on big-name games, articles on AI, and no end of game development insight. If you're interested in coding your own games you'll find it intriguing. If you're not, you'll still find it intriguing. Just a bit more confusing.

www.gamasutra.com

CALL OF DUTY MOD

Leon CoD 2

Still fighting the *CoD* war

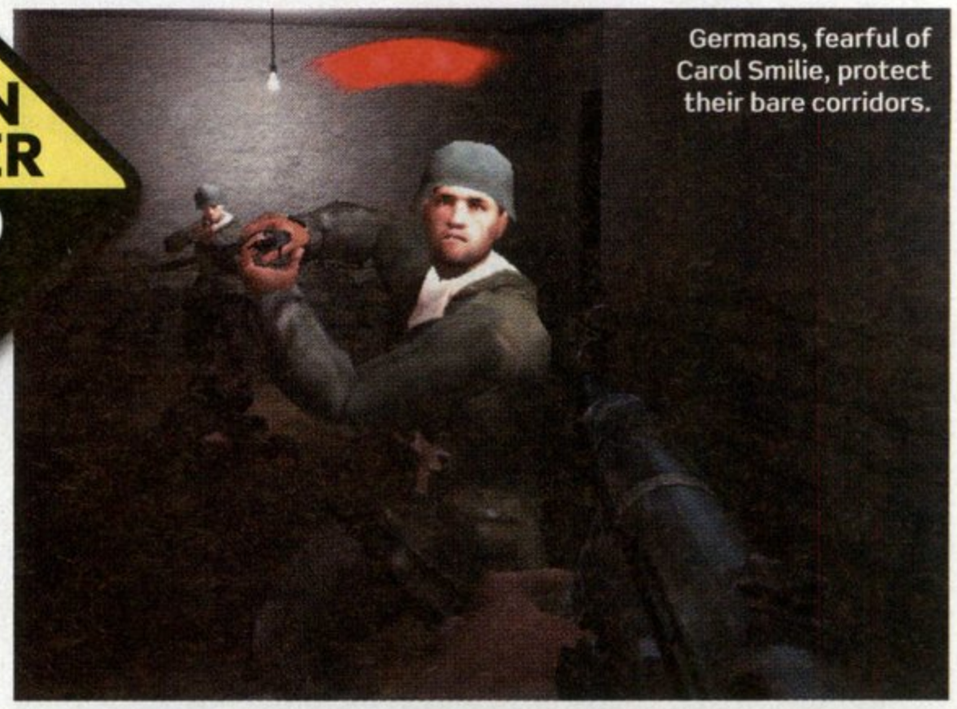
DOWN LOADER SOLO WAR

You know, if games were Hollywood movies, this little map pack would involve a grizzled WWII veteran, called out of retirement for one more mission. His former captain, who he's come to love like a brother, would brief him and mention the words "suicide" and "mission", before they bade the manliest goodbye you could imagine.

It's a self-contained single-player *Call of Duty* mission, four levels long. Rescue a captured intelligence agent from the SS before they have the chance to torture the whereabouts of the Fallen Madonna With The Big Boobies (*are you sure this is completely right?* – Accuracy Ed) out of him.

Your journey through the slick, content-packed levels is rife with danger. There's not a corner that hasn't been smartly placed to provide the Germans with solid cover, and no decent sniper position is left unoccupied. Best of all, the elegant way the streets back onto each other, and the way the buildings look out over the action to provide shortcuts and glimpses of the action up ahead, interconnects these levels to an extent rarely seen in amateur level design.

Leon is well worth blowing the cobwebs off that copy of *Call of Duty,* for a couple of hours of war.



Germans, fearful of Carol Smilie, protect their bare corridors.

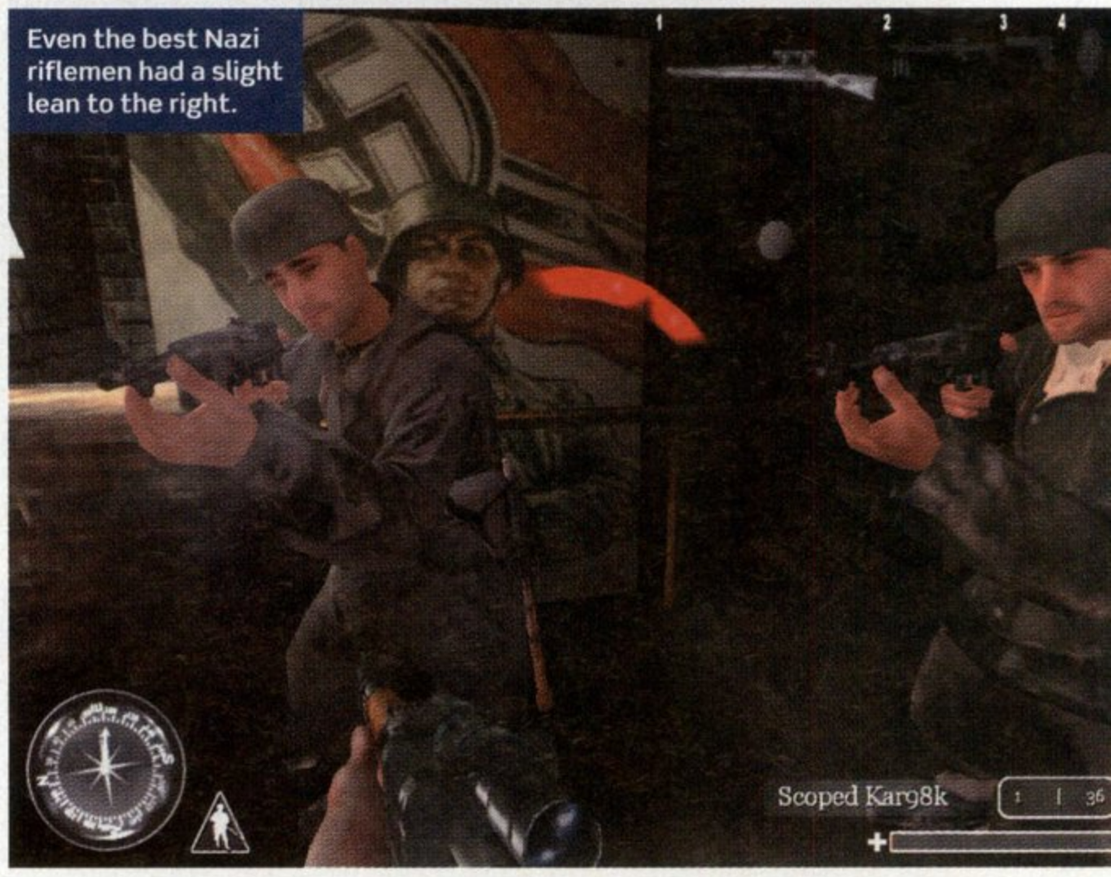
Blank walls, weaponry, vacant expression. Authentic Glasgow housing estate action.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

10Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.codfiles.com
Discs	On the disc
Requires	Call of Duty, patched to 1.5
Pro-level single-player mission	



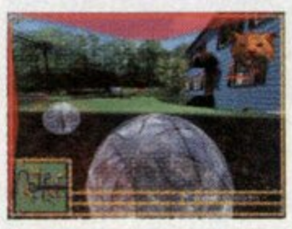
UPDATE

ESSENTIAL MODS

Forgotten Hope 0.66

Battlefield 1942
288Mb Patch, 1.7Gb Install
http://forgottenhope.bf1942files.com/main.html
Fixes and updated textures for the definitive *Battlefield* World War II mod that adds new classes, vehicles and more than doubles the map count.

Snow War 2.0
Half-Life
34.5Mb Install
http://snowwar.hlgaming.com
Version 2.0 of this four-year-old snowball fighting mod for the original *Half-Life* includes 19 maps and a dozen player models.



Hamster Bash 5.1
UT 2004
1Mb patch
www.eigensoft.com/hamsterbash.html
A lighthearted rodent-in-a-ball multiplayer deathmatch mod.

Calling all mods, indy games, machinima, shareware... Send your links to:
dan@derwenthoward.com.au

HALF-LIFE 2 MAP

Half-Life 2: DM_Depot

Time to take out the frustration on the station

Half-Life 2's grim, eastern European setting is beautifully evoked in this stunning deathmatch map. A rotten train depot in the rear-end of nowhere. Overgrown weeds fight their way up out of parched ground, which quivers as trains pass overhead, not daring to stop at this outpost. Perfect for stealth, sniping and all-out war.

A beautifully balanced map, there's not one single spot that doesn't give you a clear shot on someone while letting others take you out. Every decision you make is a double-edged sword. If you stay low in the undergrowth sprouting at the very bottom of the map, you're safe, but you can't fight either. The middle-ground is packed with weapons, but full of horrible little corners and coverage. On high, you get a complete view of the map, but there's a number of different pathways to sneak up there. It's not safe. Rich in detail, this is probably the best *HL2* fan map so far.

If you look closely, you can pinpoint the very second his life insurance paid out.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

3.5Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.littlelostpoly.co.uk
Discs	On the disc
Requires	Half-Life 2
Well-trained deathmatch splendour	

Bloody battles

There's something missing from *The Battle for Middle-Earth*'s rumbles, and it's a splash of the red stuff. Bodies everywhere, sure, but not even a dribble of the red krovvy parts from their veins. That's where the blood mod comes in, adding gore and decals to the magic and mayhem. You can now bleed a Balrog, eviscerate an Elf and indeed, harm a Hobbit. Version 1.1 only has different blood effects, but future updates will have heads flying like fireworks and collapsible structures. JRR would be so proud. Grab it at **http://redsys.ru/** or from our coverdisc.

DOOM 3 MOD

Last Man Standing 0.1

Not a drinking game

"*Last Man Standing*, is it? I see. Bubba, tear this guy's legs off."

Last Man Standing on the Ceiling just doesn't have the same ring to it, somehow.

Last Man Standing is a single-player mod about extending that final moment as long as possible. When all hope is lost and you're up to your eyeballs in Satan's first-cousins, blasting wildly into the mob. You *know* you're going down, but just how many will you take with you?

Fight for survival, against endlessly respawning zombies. Every time you kill one, they drop a vital bit of ammo or armour. To keep alive and replenished, you need to keep dropping *them*. But this is *Doom 3*: the corridors are claustrophobic and the attacks can come from anywhere.

It's in very early beta and needs some serious tweaking to the spawn times – at the moment it's way too easy to get stuck in a corner behind piles of zombies. The next version, with multiplayer co-op is likely to be the real deal. But with five custom maps and a double-barrelled shotgun, there's plenty of new action right now.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

42Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	http://lms.d3files.com
Discs	On the DVD
Requires	Doom 3, patched to 1.1
I'm going to Hell, who's coming with me?	

TA MOD

Ultimate TA

Unceasing war continues

DOWN LOADER ROBOT LOVE

Total Annihilation: an RTS game about robots soldiering on long after their masters have become extinct. *UTASP*: a collection of units and vehicles created and crafted by fans, long after the company that created their favourite game has dispersed. To all intents and purposes, *TA* is dead. Yet the community lives on.

A mine. Or possibly a robot. Or a mining robot. Maybe a mine where they mine robot ore.

UTASP is a credit to their work. It's primarily a robot release: hundreds of new vehicles, hovercraft and robots grouped together for your convenience. Unlike most fan-created unit packs, a thorough process of bug-testing and refinement has ensured that these units work straight off the bat – alongside new AI scripts that ensure your PC knows how to use the new toys too. Our favourite is a support bot, the laser metal extractor. It can be deployed into border positions to scavenge iron deposits, but twin laser cannons will also bring down any crafty air-attacks.

PCGAMES DOWNLOAD MANAGER

8Mb

DATA FLOW

Link	www.planetannihilation.com/madta
Discs	On the disc
Requires	Patched TA, Core Combat expansion
Robotic, yet inspired. A great unit expansion	

FREEWARE

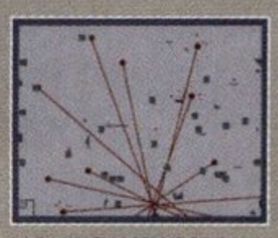
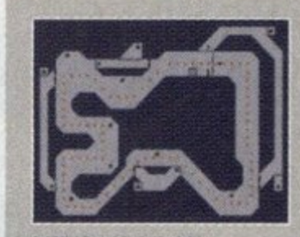
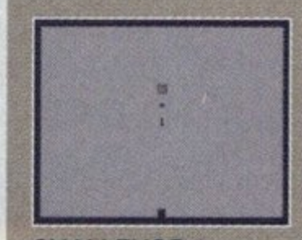
N Community

Floorplans of death

N is the physics-powered, minimalist Flash platform game in which a ten-pixel-tall ninja, N, jumps and flips around while evading murderous drones. It comes with Ned, the level-editor, and there's a huge community of hardcore *N* players (well, *more* hardcore) producing amazing new levels all the time.

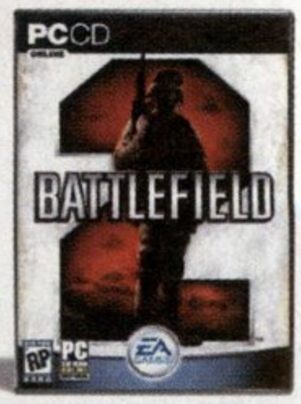
Levels range from the quite literally impossible Survival maps to the Newtonian spectable of 'DDA's. It stands for Don't Do Anything, and levels of this kind are Machiavellian Rube Goldberg devices of near-death, shoving and catapulting your ninja into deadly traps from which he is rescued at the last split-second by a Deus Ex Machina platform or jump-pad.

N itself is completely free and on the discs, along with these five brilliant levels and the next five best. Thousands more are to be had at numa.notdot.net.

THE LEVEL	THE FUN
IT'S MY NIGHTMARE	Every good DDA features some close shaves, but this one virtually skins N's chin. Author Sendy openly teases you by flinging N into situations you realise are fatal at the exact moment you're saved from them, riding an emotional rollercoaster at breakneck speeds.
 LIGHT FANTASTIC	*The Light Fantastic* is a more stylised DDA. N is dropped into an arena dotted with no fewer than nine laser drones, and is shoved around by the friendly end of 'thwumps' while beautiful patterns of laser light converge angrily wherever he was a thirtieth of a second ago.
 MISSILE RACE	Race levels are essentially regular levels with superior flow, meaning you can work up enormous velocity as you hurtle round them, bouncing off walls and using the game's physics to accelerate. As an added incentive, this one also has a swarm of homing missiles chasing you.
 CHALLENGE #9	A series of ultra-minimalist levels by N-expert TKTKTK, the *Simple Challenges* are more like tutorials than conventional levels. Each of them seems utterly impossible at first, but once you grasp the principle he's trying to teach, they're merely very difficult. Think fast.
MOUNT DOOM	Hard beyond words, but one of the most satisfying levels. The red mines that make up the 'lava' are so dense and devilishly placed only the nimblest of ninjas will find a path through to the top. Once inside, you've got a Gatling Drone and Thwumping stalactites to face.

MOD NEWS

***Battlefield 2* isn't even out yet. Its first killer mod is.**



BATTLEFIELD 2

Mech Tactical Simulation

Robots on the rise

The long-established *Battletech* universe is a mod-maker's dream. We're talking warring factions and giant, lumbering robots tricked out with rockets and lasers. Projects are spawning all around us, and in *Mech Tactical Simulation* we now have a mod for a game that's not even released yet: *Battlefield 2*.

MTS will be a multiplayer game built around *Battlefield*'s trusted Conquest mode. Add big stompy robots to that and the carnage is guaranteed, yet *MTS* will be primarily a tactical game. Harnessing *Battlefield 2*'s new Commander strategic mode, it aims to enable players to orchestrate battles and call in bombardments from orbiting warships. The mod team's desire to create a true simulation of *Battletech* war is best demonstrated by their approach to map making. Satellite imagery and digital models of real-world locations such as the Nevada desert are being used to ensure that the terrain you're stomping all over will be as realistic as possible.

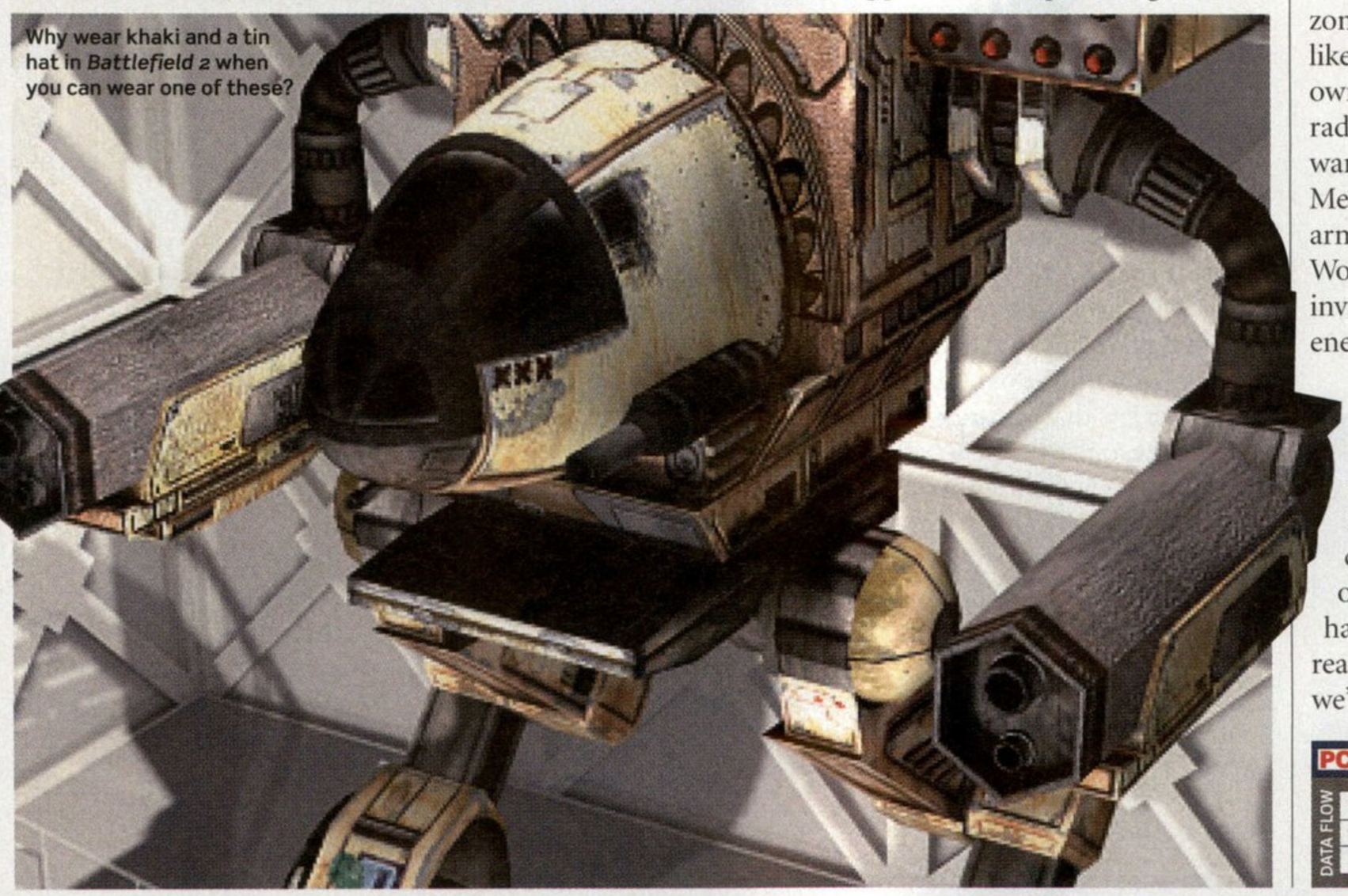
Three classic *Battletech* factions will stalk these battlegrounds. The Word of Blake is a crazed religion, driven to save mankind from itself and flatten all in its path. The brute force and technology of the Clan and the balanced forces of the Inner Sphere stand in their way.

The Word of Blake is a crazed religion

The three will share the 13 'Mech' types on offer, ranging from the nippy recon robots to huge 100 tonne hulks of walking destruction. And we'll be able to customise our rides to create a total of 57 chassis types in all, with an arsenal of autocannons, lasers and long-range missiles.

Uniquely for a *Battletech* game, we'll get to wage war outside of our bulky robotic suits. Pegging it around the war zone with Mechs on the loose sounds like suicide, but infantry will get their own hardened battle armour, plus radar detection systems to help avoid wandering Mechs and some hefty Mech-size weaponry. Stealthy Purifier armoured suits, however, can render Word of Blake infantry almost invisible, enabling them to infiltrate enemy lines.

The *MTS* team are also planning a 'Head-On' mode: a deathmatch duel hosted in huge arenas. Here it's all about customising your Mech to suit your own flavour of combat, and recycling your opponent with some very heavy hardware. If you wanted another reason to look forward to *Battlefield 2*, we've just given you one.


Why wear khaki and a tin hat in *Battlefield 2* when you can wear one of these?

PC GAMES README

DATA FLOW

Type Multiplayer
Link http://mts.battletechmodproductions.com
Percentage complete 30%

Gauls fought in their pyjamas. Fact.

ROME: TOTAL WAR

MOD NEWS
REMAKING HISTORY

Europa Barbarorum

Lend me your history books

Enjoying *Rome: Total War* are you? That's nice. Well here's some news for you – according to the makers of *Europa Barbarorum*, Creative Assembly's opus is about as historically accurate as Pinocchio's blog. So while we don't want to spoil your enjoyment of the greatest strategy game of our time, we owe it to you to tell you about this mod.

Europa Barbarorum has been coded by a team that originally came together to inspire Creative to add some historical accuracy to the barbarian factions. It's now spun out of control. "Since the majority of factions needed help, the group decided over many months to expand the efforts to all factions and all gameplay," explains mod leader Brian Bilek. "In short, *Europa Barbarorum* is a community effort to make *Rome: Total War* a more fun, historically accurate, realistic and challenging game."

That's a big project, and Bilek's team are giving the whole single-player campaign a facelift, expanding the map to the north to include Scandinavia and to the East to introduce India. They'll be adding a new economic system, new methods of recruitment, and fresh siege equipment and artillery. The team boasts two full-time historians and they've even recruited voice talent, fluent in ancient Latin and Greek, to provide a more accurate representation of those factions in the game. The mod will also oust what Bilek calls the 'fun but historically challenged' units such as the headhurlers and screeching women. If that makes them sound like spoilsports, consider this. The many unit types being added include the Gaesatea – a band of Gallic warriors who fought starkers while totally off their heads on chemicals. The prospect of those guys running at our Hastati with their weapons swinging brings tears to our eyes. You see? History can be fun.

PC GAMES README

DATA FLOW
- **Type** Single-player
- **Link** forums.totalwar.org/vb/forumdisplay.php?f=70
- **Percentage complete** 40%

June 7, 140BC: Romans discover quicksand.

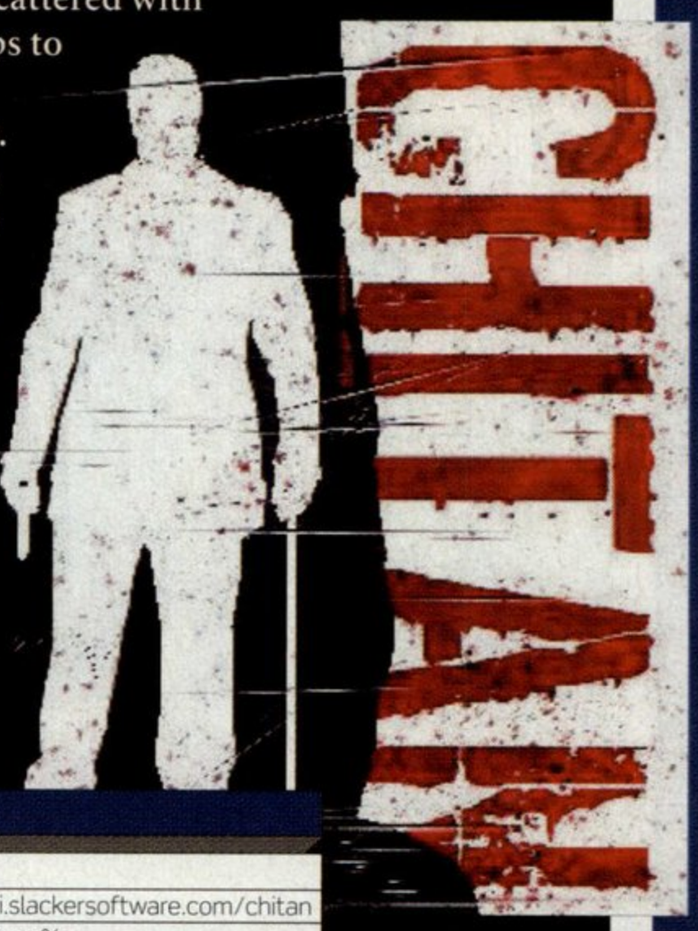
HALF-LIFE 2

Chitan Hardboiled Killers

Murder in more than three minutes

Hardboiled they may be, but these killers won't be camping out with sniper rifles and rampaging with rocket launchers. This multiplayer mod has the Triad and Red Dragon factions of the Chinese Underground clashing with pistols and sub-machineguns, plus an array of melee weapons. At the top of the bill, the Katana sword, capable of slicing up human flesh like iceberg lettuce. Then when things get really cosy, the Kung Fu moves take to the stage. These will work as they would for any classic 2D beat-em-up: there will be combos to learn and speciality moves for each customisable character, such as the ability to snap an opponent's neck and flip over them while their lifeless corpse wriggles to the floor. Sweet.

This kind of ultra-violence is already taking shape. The maps will be plot-based, taking their cue from the movies and scattered with vehicles and props to make for some Woo-style action. Run your retinas over the banquet of shots on the disc and you can almost see the white doves scatter.



PC GAMES

DATA FLOW
- **Type** Multiplayer
- **Link** http://habakuhei.slackersoftware.com/chitan
- **Percentage complete** 10%

HALF-LIFE 2

SVEN COOP SOURCE

The legendary *Half-Life* mod that lets you fight through single-player maps alongside your mates is on its way to Source. Hardly shocking news, but it's a big bonus for a *HL2* mod scene that's brimming with ambitious total conversions but perhaps bereft of dead certs. *Sven Coop is* a dead cert, although details are sketchy at this early stage. We do know that there are already custom single-player co-op maps in the making, and that there will be new monsters and weapons to sprinkle among them. The news we all want to hear, however, is that *Sven Coop* will enable us to play through the *HL2* storyline alongside other gamers. We can expect some minor changes to the maps and some balance tweaks, but the mod team are promising to stay true to Valve's original single-player experience. Add **www.svencoop.com** to your bookmarks now.

How to animate faces with *Half-Life 2* FacePoser

BY HENRIK LARSSON

D-I-Y

Make *Half-Life 2* characters say anything you want

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

Skill Intermediate
Time 2 hours

WHAT WILL I NEED?

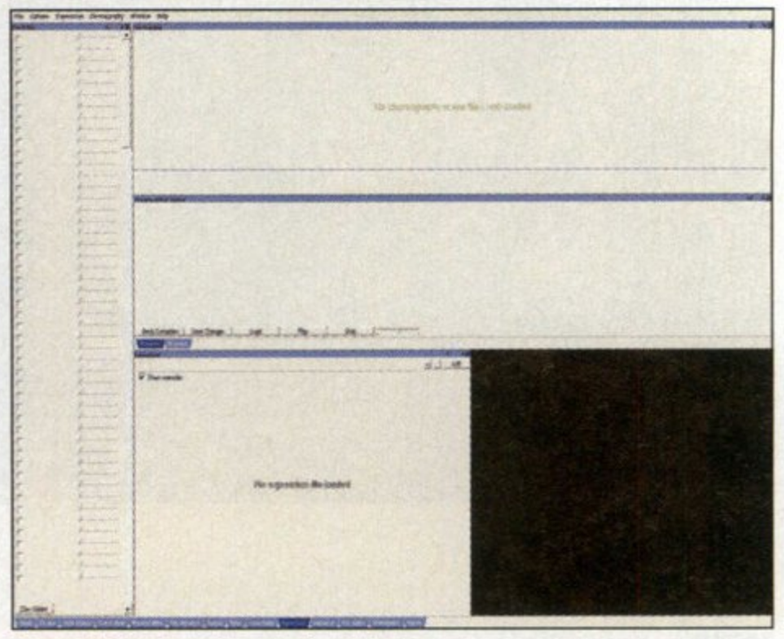
- A copy of *Half-Life 2*
  Which you have, obviously
- A *HL2* mod created in the SDK
  Use the SDK Wizard for this
- A custom wav file
  There's a sample file on your disc

PCGAMES RESOURCE HARVESTER

- **Online guide to using FacePoser**
  www.valve-erc.com/srcsdk/faceposer/faceposer.html
- **Half-Life 2 modding forums**
  www.hl2world.com/bbs
- **More Half-Life 2 forums**
  www.halflife2.net/forums
- **Half-Life 2 modding tips**
  www.interlopers.net/content.php?article.cat.48
- **Sample scripts, wav file and mapping tutorial**
  On your CD in the Toolkits/DIY menu.

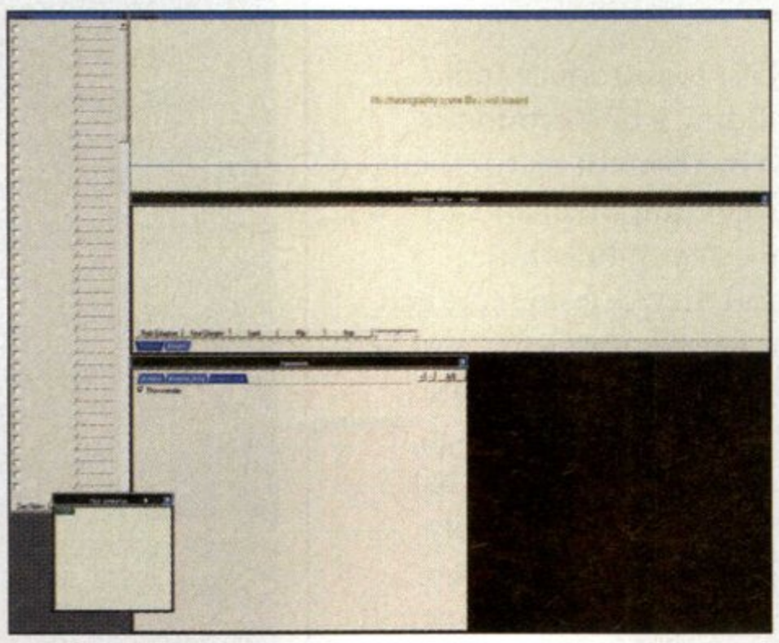
01 STARTING FACEPOSER

Start FacePoser by clicking on your Steam app on the desktop. Open the 'Play Games' dialogue box and double click the Source SDK at the foot of the games list. The tools will then load. Now you should see a list with various documents and tools. Double click on FacePoser. If you want to create a desktop shortcut, make it to hlfaceposer.exe, in \SteamApps\username@email.com\ sourcesdk\bin\ in your Steam folder.



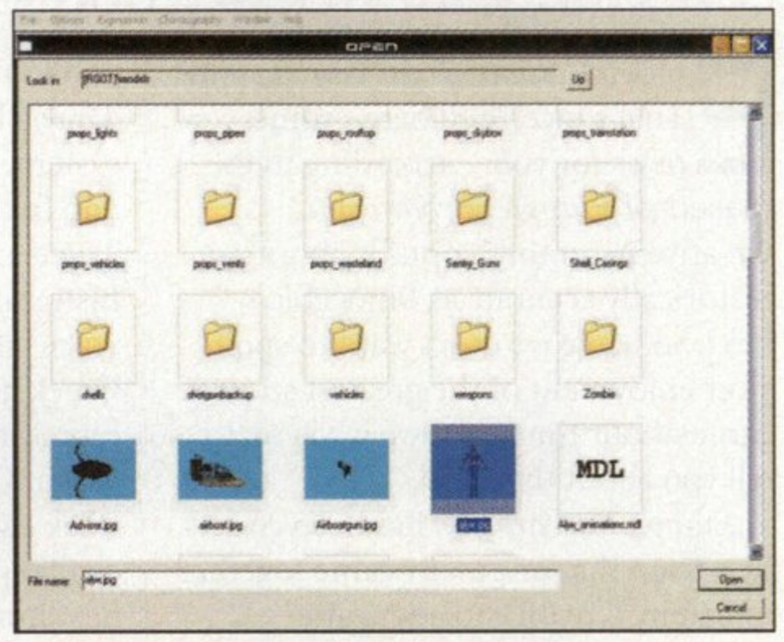
02 TOOLS OF THE TRADE - 1

Opening the tool, you'll see a number of panels. These include 3D View, Flex Sliders – which enables you to animate the skeleton in the face of your model –and Choreography, which gives access to the timeline of when the animations and sounds will play. Other panels open via tabs at the bottom of the screen. Double click Phoneme Editor, where we will modify sounds to make the mouth animate accordingly. Also, open the Expressions tab.



03 TOOLS OF THE TRADE - 2

The other panel we will be using is Flex Animation, where your animations will be transferred to your Choreography Window from your Flex Sliders. Make all these panels as big as possible to give you more space to work with. To dock a dialogue in position, just right click on the bar over the window and it will stay at that position. You can also hide/unhide panels and windows from the menu bar, using the options on the Window menu.



04 EMPLOYING A MODEL

Next we'll load a character model. Click Load Model in the File menu. Now a window should pop up where you can select the model that you want to work with. It doesn't matter which one you choose at this stage as all human characters in the game use the same skeleton, which means that any animation made for one character will work with another. Let's use the lovely Alyx. Scroll through the models and select Alyx.jpg.

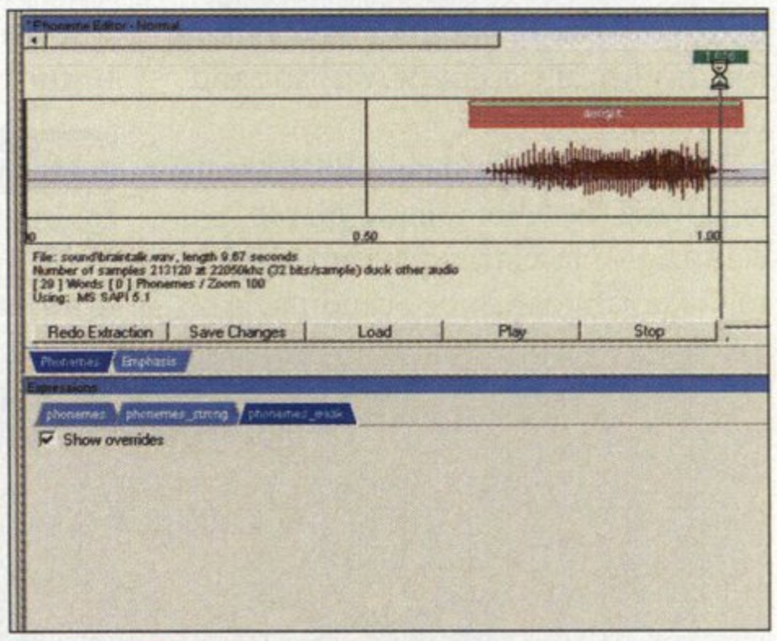
```
"Custom.Sound.Name"
{
        "channel"               "CHAN_VOICE"
        "volume"                "VOL_NORM"
        "pitch"                 "PITCH_NORM"

        "soundlevel"            "SNDLVL_TALKING"

        "wave"                  "customsoundfile.wav"
}
```

05 CUSTOM SOUNDS

The wav file of speech to animate must be placed in your mod folder in a 'Sound' directory. We must instruct *HL2* to preload this file, so minimise Poser and browse to your mod Scripts folder. Open game_sounds_ manifest.txt. Add a line to load our character sounds: "precache_file" "scripts/game_sounds_chars.txt". Next, create the game_sounds_chars.txt file shown above. You'll find this file and a sample manifest on your disc.

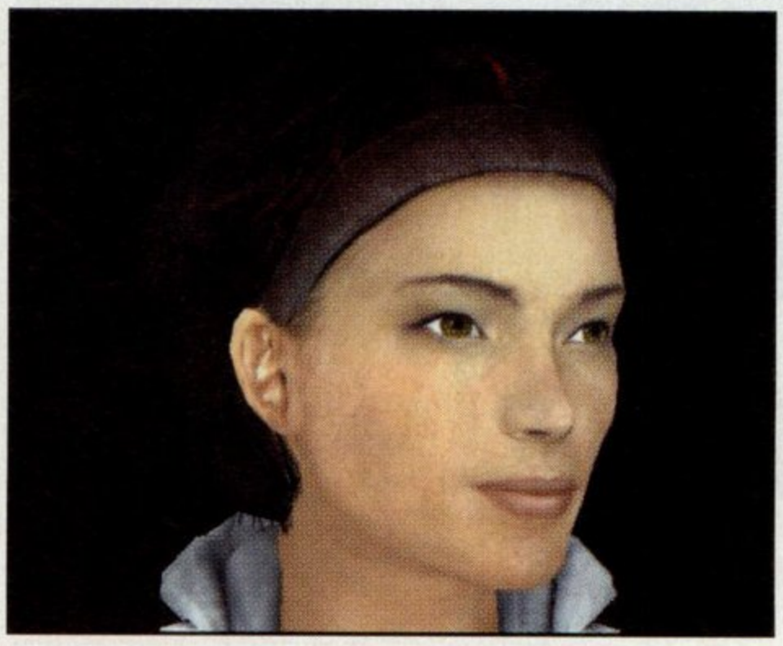


06 ADDING SPEECH

Back in Poser, click the Phoneme Editor tab, hit load and select your wav file. You should now see soundwaves in the Phenome Editor. Right click on them, and select: "Redo Extraction". You will now be asked to enter the text of the sentence to accompany the sound. Enter each word to be spoken in a box, spread out equally throughout the timeline. Adjust the box to correspond with the sound-wave. Hold down Shift to drag it, and Ctrl to alter its length.

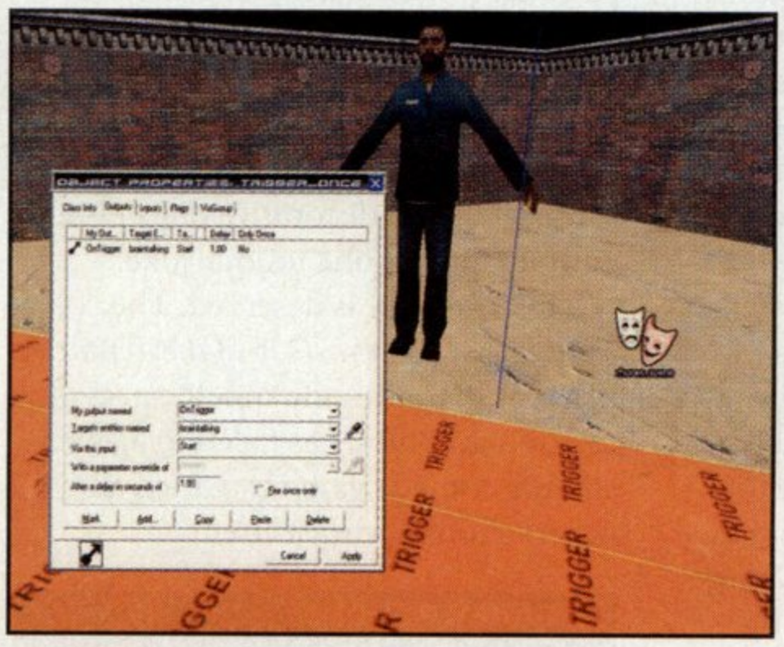
07 CHOREOGRAPHY

Now you need export the information. Click Redo Extraction again, open the Choreography menu, select New and save to the scenes folder. You should automatically be asked to create an actor: enter a name and click OK. Now right click inside the timeline of the actor, and select New > Channel, name it 'sound'. Right click in the sound timeline, and select your custom wav file. Enter a name at the top of the dialogue box and click OK.



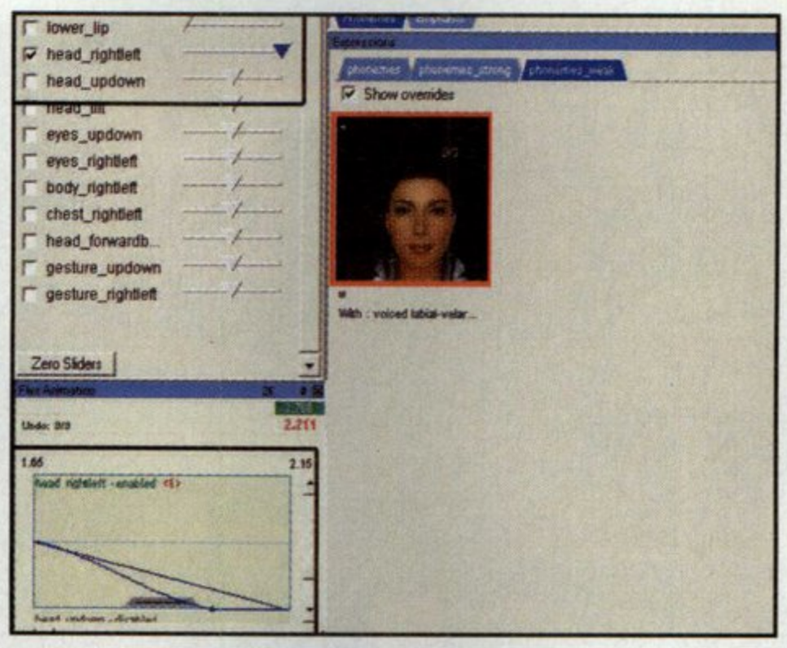
09 FLEX ANIMATIONS - 2

Move the green slider at the top of the panel to the middle. In the Flex Sliders window, move the head_rightleft slider to the far right, unsurprisingly, the head turns right. Right click in the Flex Animation panel, select Flex > Copy From Sliders. Now everything should be smoothly animated. Double click the green part of your Flex Animation window. The graph you see is the animation transition, you can make it smoother, and insert new keyframes here.



11 USING SCENES IN HL2 - 2

Enter the properties of the entity and give it a name. Go to the Scene File key, and browse for the .VCD file that you created with FacePoser. Then go to the Target 1 key, and select the NPC you just created. To trigger this animation you'll need to create a brush with the trigger texture and convert it into an entity, make it a trigger_once entity. In the Outputs tab, add an output that targets the scene and you're all done. (See last issue's DIY for entity tips.)

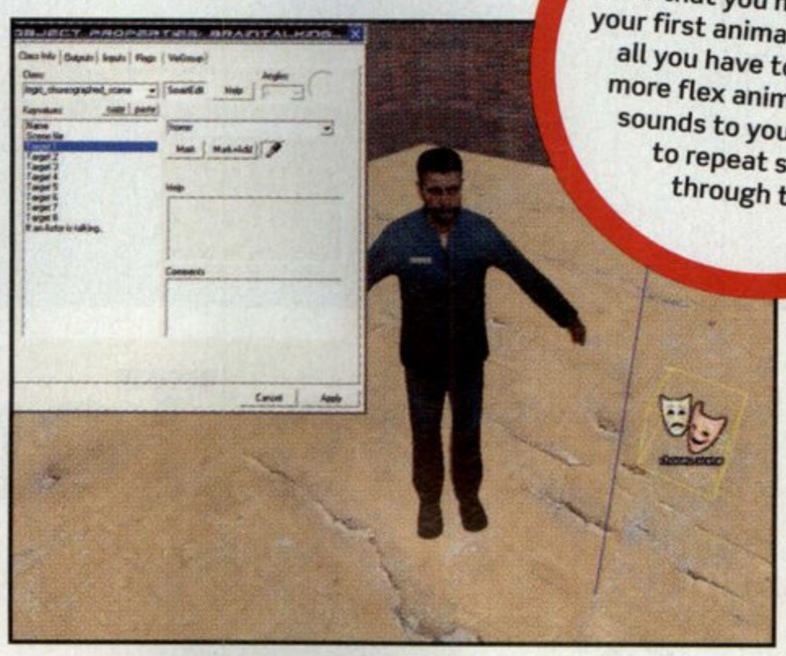


08 FLEX ANIMATIONS - 1

You should now see a small green slider in the Choreography panel. Move the slider: you should see the mouth move according to the text. Now it's time for manual animation. Make a new channel and name it 'flex'. Right click the new timeline, and select Flex Animation. Give it a name that fits, eg, 'headturn'. Move it into position and resize it to fit the animation.

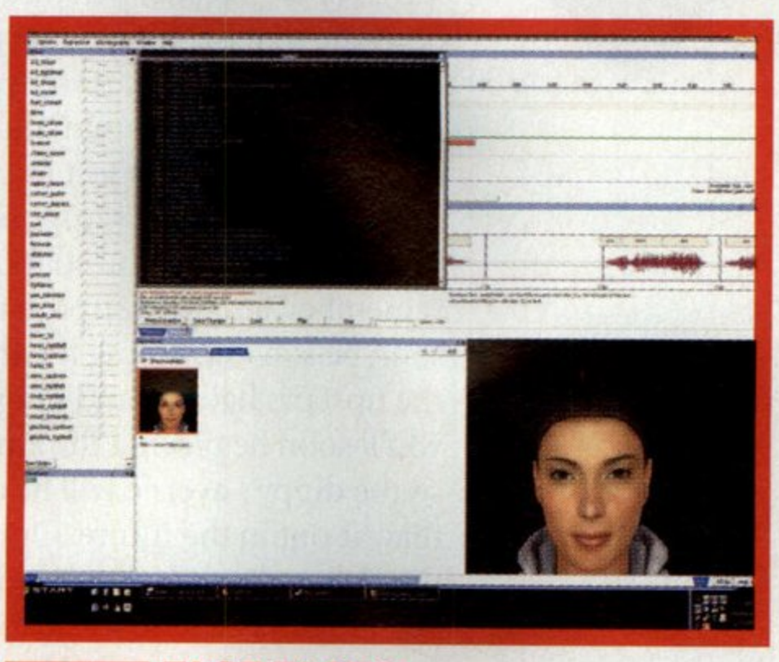
INSIGHT

Now that you have installed your first animation in-game, all you have to do to add more flex animations and sounds to your scene is to repeat steps 6 through till 9.



10 USING SCENES IN HL2 - 1

Open the map you plan to use the animation in, create an entity with the Entity Tool (Shift+E), and select 'npc_citizen' from the list. To place it, hover your mouse over a 2D-view and press Enter. Now, use the Selection Tool (Shift+ S), and select the entity. Right click it and select Properties. Start off by giving the character the same name you gave the character in FacePoser. Then create a logic_choreographed_scene entity near your character.

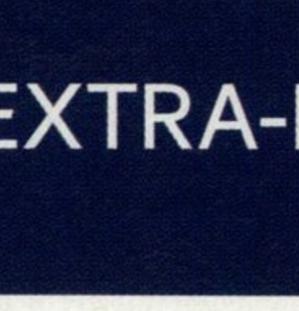


12 FACE FACTS

Run your map, trigger your animation and it should execute. There are a couple of bugbears to look out for, however. If FacePoser gives you a message about a gameinfo.txt file, this can be solved by creating a shortcut as in step 1, and adding ' -game <directory> where <directory> is the location of your mod. If the Redo Extraction button won't work, update your Speech API to 5.1. Refer to Microsoft's support forums if you're having trouble with this.

Design Law Debunked

Not a rule "The crucial element is the gameplay"



Dave Morris is lead designer at Elixir

It was one of those quotation sites. Not "season of mists" or "do not go gentle". Instead pithy aphorisms like: "The primary ethic in constructing a game is the gameplay." Sometimes you need just the facts. The home truths.

But how true is it? They call this business games because that's how it got started. Programmers realised that it was easy to use computers to set people problems to solve, and the kind of problems that are fun to solve are called games. QED.

We'll go on calling them games, but nowadays gameplay is no longer essential.

Take my gaming group – and we're talking old-style gaming now, you understand. The other evening we played first a boardgame of Middle-Earth, then an old classic called Condottieri. Oh, it's one of the great games of all time, is that – fascinating opportunities for strategic plays, bluff and audacious cunning. The Middle-Earth game is just an abstract, tedious bit of nonsense. But it had luscious boards painted by the production designer on the movies. And – crucially – on the front of the box it had the all-conquering words "Lord of the Rings".

Did the gameplay matter? Not half as much as the choice of subject matter, as far as till receipts are concerned.

A couple of years back, a publisher was considering a videogame of the Trojan Wars. They decided the setting was too obscure and shelved the project. And they were right. Brad Pitt in his sandals might have changed that, but back then, nine out of ten punters would have walked right past a box labeled 'Troy' without a glance, and it wouldn't matter how good the gameplay was.

The best design and technology won't sell a videogame called *Condottieri*. And why should it? The top stars aren't the best actors. The best TV scripts don't make the best shows. It's not a good or a bad thing. It's entertainment.

■ **This design column regularly appears in game development trade journal Develop.**

Want to write a mod tutorial for PC GAMES ADDICT? Then contact **dan@derwenthoward.com.au**

Use can-opener on table. Use can-opener on wig. Use can-opener on window. Use can...
Use can-opener
Give Pick up Use
Open Look at Push
Close Talk to Pull

Day of the Tentacle

I feel like I could... TAKE ON THE WORLD!

LONG PLAY COMEDY HERO

Sometimes a piece of work can become so frequently celebrated that any sense of objective discourse is lost, and only fevered mono-opinions remain. Is the Mona Lisa really a great work of art, or was it just an off-day for Da Vinci? And is *Day of the Tentacle* really the greatest adventure game of all time, or have reflections been so rose-tinted for so long that no one dares say otherwise for fear of street lynchings?

Going back to play it again is the only way to be sure that *DOTT* is still every bit as flipping excellent as anyone has ever claimed. I've done so far too many number of times over the last 12 years, and it never fails to unleash the same joy, the same laughs, and crucially, the same superbly crafted narrative that defies space and time.

Imagine someone who had never played it. Imagine if they didn't know that the game puts you in control of three characters in three different times, charged with preventing the evil Purple Tentacle from taking over the world. They also wouldn't know that it was the sequel to LucasArts' previous *Maniac Mansion*, which while offering lots of in-jokes for the in-crowd, didn't need to be played first (and indeed is hidden in the game in full). Far worse, that person wouldn't be aware that the traditional point and click adventure memes were given a needed kick up the originality, playing on the time-travel aspect to perfection.

Playing it again, it's impossible not to note the objects you so fondly remember, and the purpose they will soon be solving. Seeing the freezer in the upstairs hallway and knowing you'll soon be placing the hamster in it, so the dippy Laverne will be able to thaw it out in the future. Or noticing the yellow-fruited tree outside George Washington's window and looking forward to when roadie Hoagie paints them red to look like cherries to get it chopped down, thus removing it in Bernard's present and Laverne's future.

Played by
John Walker
Played For
12 years, on and off

ON THE DISC Want to play great old-school adventures like this? The app you need is ScummVM > Toolkit

A wanton disregard for historical accuracy combined with the merciless damage the characters wreak on the timeline, sewn together by such perfectly poised puzzles, ensure the game is endlessly innovative and constantly challenging. But reigning supreme is the humour. Not one opportunity to use a character's cliché is wasted, not a decorative object is left without at least one unique joke.

The reverence is deserved. The rhetoric is realistic. *Day of the Tentacle*, perhaps thanks to the timelessness of cartoon graphics, has failed to age. It's still the comedy game by which all others should be measured.

PCGAMES README

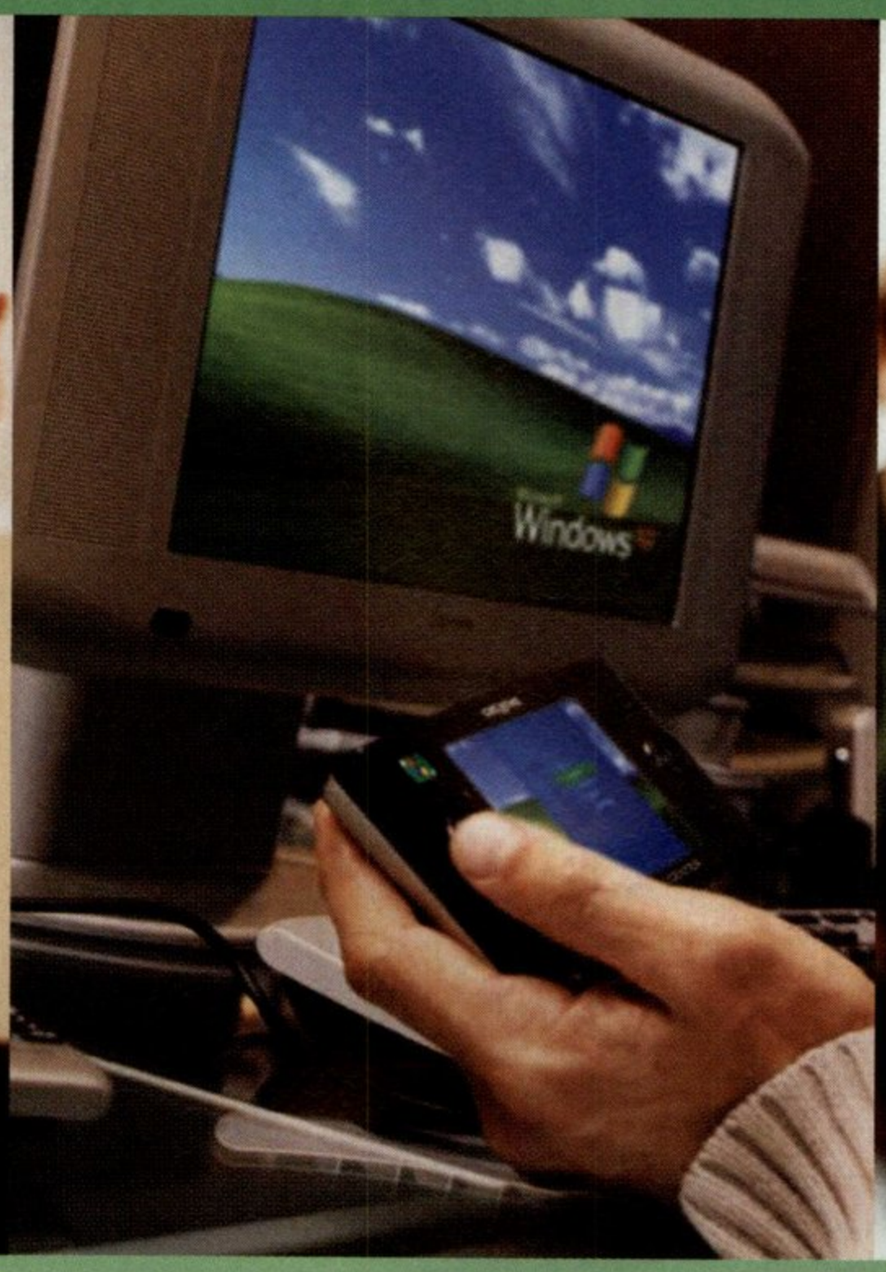
DATA FLOW

First review N/A - This is more than a decade old
Why now? Why not? It's just as good as it was
With no signs of having dated, it should be compulsory gaming in schools.

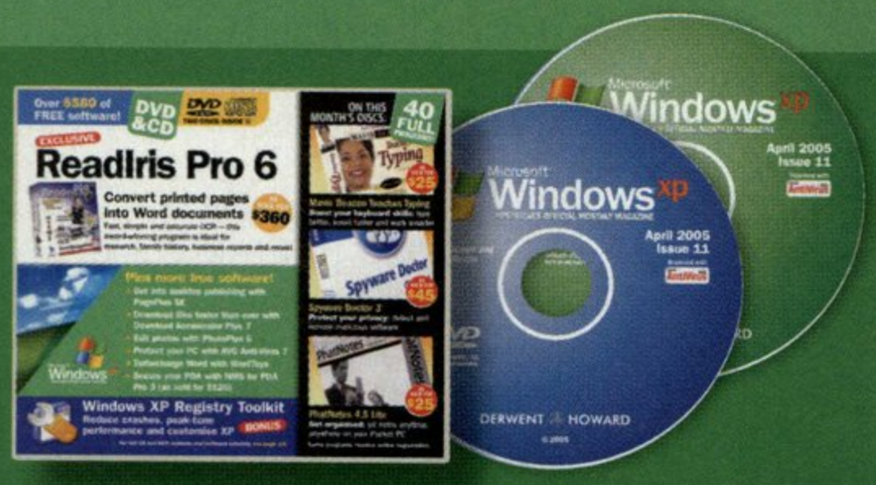
■ **Publisher** LucasArts ■ **Developer** In-house ■ **Requires** ScummVM ■ **Multiplayer** None
■ **Community** www.pixelchan.com/dayofthetentacle ■ **Spiritual successor** *Sam & Max Hit the Road, Grim Fandango* ■ **Get it from** eBay

Sadly, there's more to life than games...
happily, there's ***Windows XP Magazine***.

100% JARGON FREE

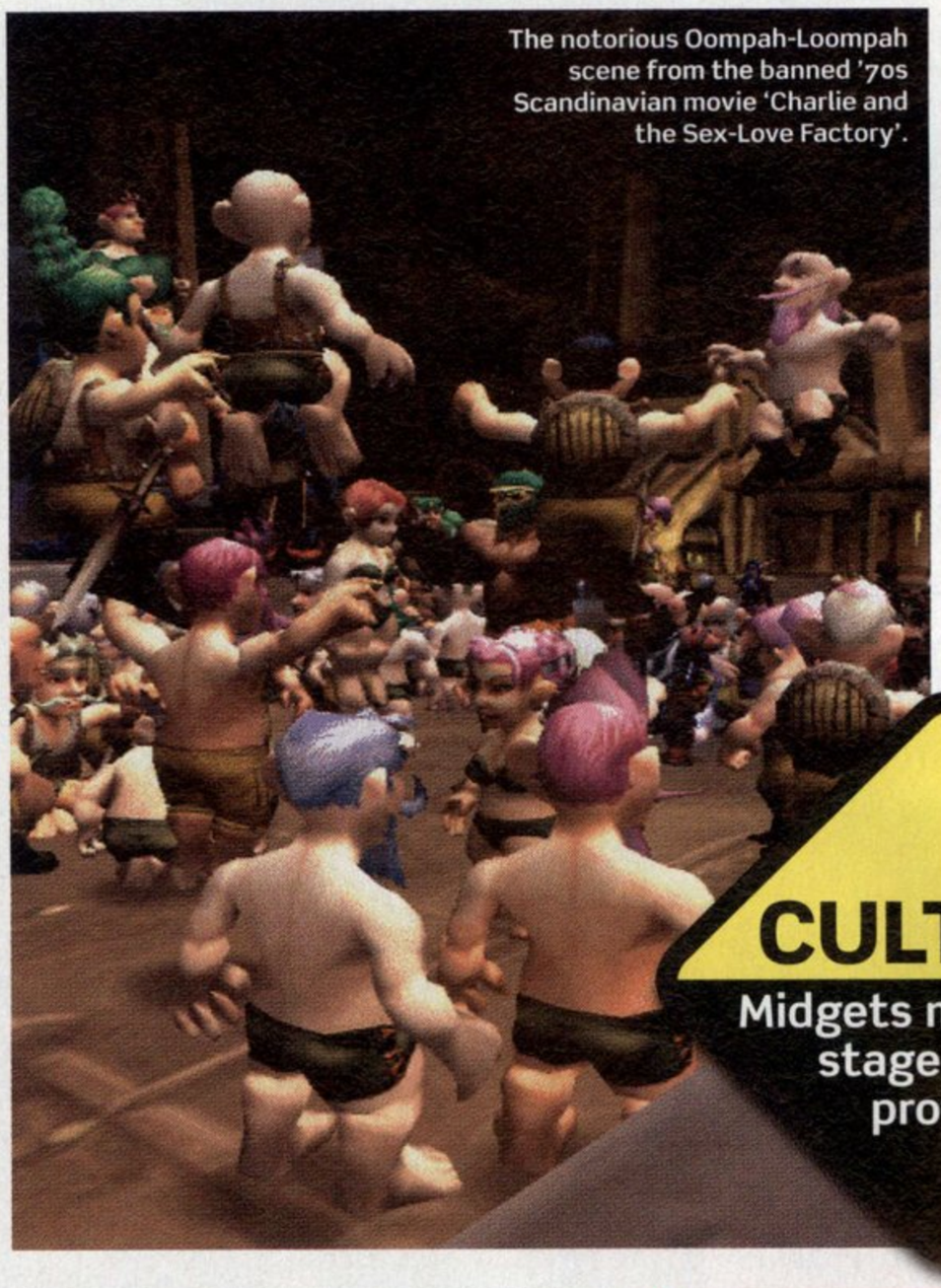


When it's time to swap Warcraft for Word, Windows XP Magazine's tutorials help you work faster and smarter so you can get back to gaming sooner! Bonus CD and DVD with free software with every issue. On sale at your newsagent now.



Microsoft® Windows® xp

AUSTRALIA'S OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE



The notorious Oompah-Loompah scene from the banned '70s Scandinavian movie 'Charlie and the Sex-Love Factory'.

CULTURE

Midgets mobilise to stage online protest

GNOME DE PLUME

Nude WoW protest

The power of ecognomics

Blizzard recently paid the price for creating a weak *World of Warcraft* character class and ignoring user pleas to fix it, as hundreds of near-naked gnomes ground the Argent Dawn server to a halt in protest.

The Warrior class *should* be the tank of the game, impervious and massively strong, but that's not the case. Other classes can dish out just as much damage, and take a beating too. Ultimately, the Warrior is pretty boring. When their complaints concerning the class fell on deaf ears, hundreds of players arranged to register new gnome personas. At a set time, they all logged into the Argent Dawn server, naked save for loin cloths and boogied through the Ironforge Auction House. The gathering caused major lag for the other users, and the protesters thus drew the attention of Blizzard.

Gamemaster warnings began peppering the chat channels: anyone caught up in the moment would have their account suspended for three hours. But three hours is a small price to pay to get your point across... in the end, the gnomes managed a small victory. They managed to bring the server down. David had slain Goliath, with a pebble to the modem.

No news yet as to whether Blizzard plan to revise the Warrior, but the real gold is in the link below, where one blogger captured the protest in action.

■ **www.cesspit.net/drupal/node/491**

DECOY TACTICS

SPRAY PAINT

Keep your eyes peeled. That terrorist you've just spotted might not be quite what you think he is. An increasing number of tactically minded gamers are using the in-built spray capability of *Counter-Strike Source* to wreak havoc across the servers. The game allows you to import high-quality animated pictures, and use them to 'tag' the walls and floors. While most players use them to flash graffiti or obscenely pornographic images at their team-mates, a small subset have created convincingly animated terrorist cut-outs to be etched onto the walls. As you turn the corner, you're greeted by a flat-out firing meanie, letting rip with an AK-47. He's a cut-out, essentially, meant to distract your eye away from the real deal sitting in the shadows two feet away.

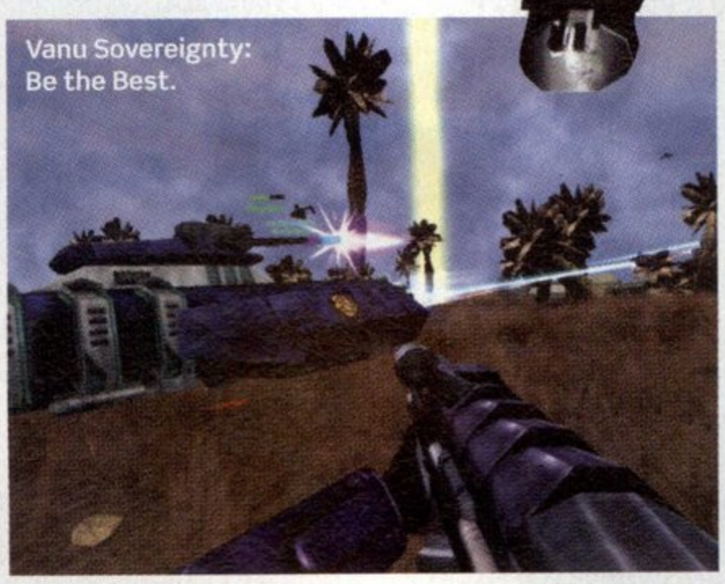
What's happening in your gaming world?
Tell us your tales of gaming wonder...
pcga@derwenthoward.com.au

GUERRILLA MARKETING

Player Power

PlanetSide players become the adverts

What do you do when all your friends leave a game you still enjoy? According to the *PlanetSide* community, the answer appears to be "find new friends." In late 2004 players concerned with publisher Sony Online Entertainment's unwillingness to spend cash on pursuing new subscribers began their own guerrilla marketing campaign. In an act of unprecedented co-operation, Vanu, Terran and New Conglomerate troopers laid down their bolt-drivers and began to spread their message via gaming web-forums posting a link to a free seven-day trial, the installer, and a spectacular video of the game in action.



Vanu Sovereignty: Be the Best.

As new players enter the servers, they are actively sought out by teams of volunteer "greeters", provided with basic training and invited on expeditions into hostile territory. If they run into trouble, there's always a support team with artillery and heavy armour, ready to back them up. The result of all this voluntary activity? Surveys of server populations have reversed their decline, and are beginning to rise. The war is still on.

To sample PlanetSide's multi-vehicle, massively multiplayer first-person war (and you really should – it's got six-storey ROBOTS and front-lines a mile-long) download the client from the official site. You'll find the trailer on our coverdisc.

■ **www.planetside.com**

LANGUAGE

Parlez Simglish?

Can the little people teach languages?

Learning from textbooks is set to be a thing of the past, the future of lessons in language may lie within PC games. According to Ravi Purushotma – researcher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology – "In one week, I met five people each claiming to be the world's worst language learner. I've already claimed this title for myself." So Ravi added life to his own language classes by installing the German edition of *The Sims* and placing a laptop with a translation tool beside his computer.

As he progressed the language was naturally enforced through play. In a simple example, players must keep track of their Sim's energy level, or 'energie' in German. Ignore the energy, and your sim gets ill; you'll soon understand what the word means.

CULTURE SPEAK-EASY

The future looks bright. As Ravi points out, "When we consider the various forms and different literacies present in a digital society, we can really have only begun to explore the possibilities. For learners, academic content may not capture their attention, let alone sustain it. In this case, we should begin with popular media that students would be interested in."

Toilettewitze übersetzen nicht gut.

CHARITY

E-GIVING

Even dragons went without their gold.

In reaction to the Asian Tsunami disaster, gamers across all genres and countries have hosted events to raise funds for charity. In Ultima Online, a well known community figure called "Crazy Joe" opened donation houses on all servers (shards) and encouraged local players to drop in any gold and unwanted items. He would then transfer the loot to eBay, and donate the real-world cash to the American Red Cross. "I admit, I'm overwhelmed at what we have done and how much we've raised," said Joe, speaking on his blog. "The Ultima Online Community has pulled together more than many of us have expected, I think everyone is as surprised as I am. At time of press, the community had raised over $2,000."

A similar effort began in the cult virtual world Second Life, a place where the game developers actively encourage ties to real-world economies. Players who make a living from crafting objects in-game all donated a portion of their earnings to the tsunami appeal. At the same time the most popular clubs all hosted their own charity events. Live strip-teases were accompanied by DJ sets and in-game dances. All for a very good cause.

WHY I LOVE... ›**Game** Dead Man's Hand ›**Gamer** Chris Buxton ›**Love affair** Emptying load on a horse

SHOOTING EVERYTHING IN SIGHT

Stay on your horse and forego your milk

Curse that last chicken! The number of times I've missed it and fluffed a high score. If it's not that chicken, it's the one on the bluff after the first still. And don't get me started on those cow skulls. Dagnabbit...

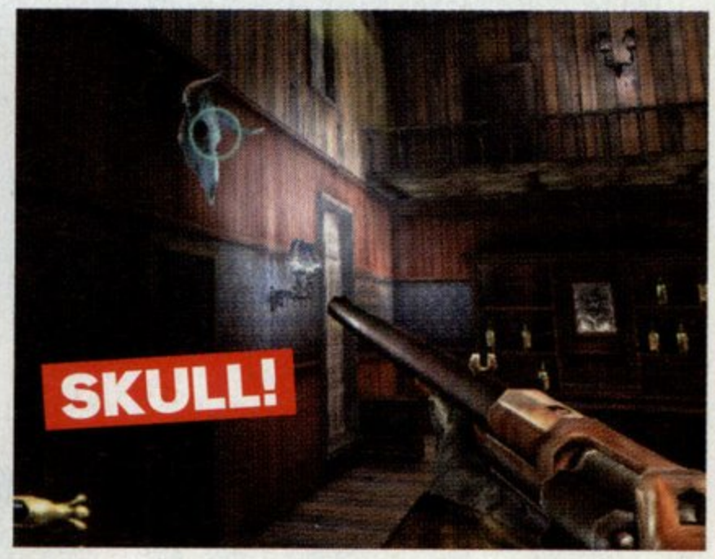
On the surface, the Sunset Rider level of *Dead Man's Hand* is not a prime candidate for replaying. For a start, it's on-rails and that is meant to be a bad thing. It's also no challenge whatsoever, with a mere handful of outlaws and ample time to pick them all off.

However, with all this time on my hands, I indulged, as you do, in a spot of casual vandalism, blasting away at the destructible scenery... and my score rocketed. And then I got it. This isn't just another level, this is a devious, irresistible exercise in the sadly dying art of pure points chasing. 22,005 is my current best, and to rack up this monumental mark, I had to shoot every bad guy, all five stills, all six chickens, all three cow skulls, every barrel of explosive - even the bell on the locomotive at the end! You may touch my hem.

It gets better, with points bonanzas for precision targeting, daisy chaining hits and shooting falling debris. And being on-rails, I only get a few chances at any target, making this a sublime test of grace under pressure. Sure, it's retro, a throwback, old-fashioned, whatever, but I don't care, I love it.

Now, where was I? Ah, yes, reckon I can topple all three of the chimneys on those shacks...

1 SHAKE A TAIL FEATHER
This is that last sodding chicken I was on about, hiding behind a rock as per usual. Unless I can clip its tail feathers on the approach, I've only got two or three shots to down it or lose out on thousands of bonus points. Note the Sunset Rider weapon of choice: the six-shots-in-three-seconds Lewis Revolving Rifle.



2 GET THE HORN
There's no trickier test for Sunset Riders than the early bar-room scene. You've got to ping the skull to send it spinning, take out all three outlaws and the piano player, pictures and bottles before your horse bolts. And there's even more points to be had from flashily firing balls into pockets on the pool table.

WIN! OVER $4,000 OF GEAR UP FOR GRABS!

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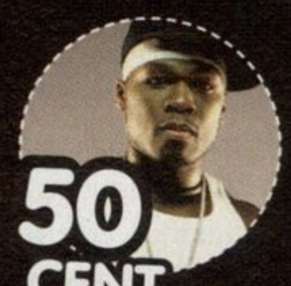

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Carmen Electra

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PC GAMES ADDICT

HARDWARE

In which our panel of seasoned hardware gurus put the latest tech toys to the test

Groupie Love

Fancy a 10-some?

Following on from the modifications we'd made to our beloved hardware section last month, this issue is the first to feature our new series of "Group Tests," which will usually and appropriately be themed around the topics that are covered in Expert Advice.

The reason for this is simple. While we try to judge a product against its immediate competition in the individual reviews, group tests enable us to benchmark an entire spectrum of gear at one time, giving you a comprehensive view of what's out there, how they compare to each other and, most importantly, which of them will provide the greatest level of enhancement to your games-playing experience.

This month, we're tackling game controllers (pads, sticks, wheels and the like), a topic that's frequently neglected despite being of integral importance to how we relate to our games, particularly for console ports or titles that can't be wholly appreciated using a keyboard and mouse.

In order to make the most effective use of our limited space, we've decided to include only the highest scoring and/or most interesting ten products that have been received for our test, and we're sure you'll have little trouble guessing which brand we were most impressed with. Whether you're a fan of arcade fighting, car racing, or even flight simulation titles, this is an all-encompassing roundup that you definitely shouldn't miss.

Feel free to forward suggestions for future group tests to asher@derwenthoward.com.au.

ASHER MOSES
HARDWARE EDITOR

Hardware this issue...

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The PC Games Addict Hardware Testing Rig

THE PCGA AWARDS

Any piece of kit that's awarded with our coveted **GOLD GEAR** award is of the best in its class and would make a valuable addition to your system. **SICK DEAL** awards go to gear that offers a good feature-set at an affordable price point. A 'sick' deal.

PC GAMES GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

PC GAMES SICK DEAL ★★★★★

Cutting-edge hardware deserves to be benchmarked on a review rig of similar merit, which is why all of the gear that passes through the PCGA labs is thoroughly stress tested on some of the best hardware money can buy.

Altech has generously supplied us with not one, but two review machines that in turn enable us to give you comprehensive coverage of both Intel and AMD platforms, free of unnecessary result-skewing bottlenecks.

CORSAIR

ABIT Advanced Durability

THE PC GAMES ADDICT REVIEW MACHINES:

INTEL REVIEW MACHINE
- Intel Pentium 4 3.2GHz
- Abit AA8XE
- Asus 256MB GeForce 6800 Ultra
- Corsair 1GB DDR2-533
- Seagate Barracuda SATA 80GB 7200RPM
- AOC 19" CRT Monitor
- Sony 12x/8x/32x CD-RW
- Lian-Li PC65 Chassis

AMD REVIEW MACHINE
- AMD Athlon 64 3500+
- Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe
- Asus 256MB GeForce 6800 Ultra
- Corsair 1GB PC3200 DDR (2x 512MB sticks)
- Seagate Barracuda SATA 80GB 7200RPM
- AOC 19" CRT Monitor
- Sony 12x/8x/32x CD-RW
- Lian-Li PC65 Chassis

EXPERT ADVICE ON GAME PERIPHERALS

How to take control of your gaming

BY MARK SUTHERNS

Admit it: you thought the halcyon days of the joystick were dead. You thought your mouse and keyboard had it covered. Then you climbed into a plane in *Battlefield 1942* and all those assumptions literally came crashing down around your ears. There are some occasions when you need some peripheral hardware on your side, and if you're a real genre-tart those occasions are going to start mounting up. Jumping to lightspeed, careering around chicanes, and banging one in from 30 yards are all far easier with the right stick, wheel and pad at your side.

ON THE DISC Read about the future of peripherals in our R&D interviews> Resources

So what factors should be considered when boosting your gaming arsenal? Well, as a rule you should always opt for devices that offer as many features as possible. We're not talking about wireless or force-feedback capability at this point, we're purely talking programmable buttons, analogue sticks and throttles. Although you can buy a joystick or pad that might work perfectly well for a game you're playing now, just as when it comes to buying a PC, you should future proof your purchase for the games you'll be playing next year.

For example, when it comes to buying a pad don't be tempted to scrimp and get yourself a basic model without twin analogue sticks. Such pads might be OK when tackling the average console conversion, so you'll save yourself a few dollars initially, but it's a false economy. Fire up the latest version of *FIFA* and you'll soon realise that without four shoulder buttons and twin analogue sticks all you've got yourself is a useless slab of cheap plastic, destined for a dusty existence on top of the wardrobe.

> You've got yourself a useless slab of plastic

Similarly, when selecting a joystick there are two features to insist upon. Firstly, ensure you opt for a stick that twists, this gives you rudder control in flight and space sims or control of the upper chassis in *MechWarrior* games. Secondly, look for a decent analogue throttle – an essential feature if you're ever likely to soar into the virtual skies. Neither of those extras adds significantly to the price but one or both features are often missing from many of the sticks available.

For steering wheels it's the pedals and gears that are all-important. Pedals need to be strong as they'll take a pounding if used constantly, and it's important that they are either fairly heavy or have a footbase that will keep them stationary during play. Gear levers are also a must. Some wheels cater for gears via buttons on the wheel, but it's a pair of digital gear levers you should look for.

Aside from the feature set there are new technologies to consider. You can now go wire free on all your peripherals, and although gamers generally mistrust wireless devices, the technology is so advanced that there is no discernable lag. Be wary though – wireless pads and sticks will cost you more and often they're a misnomer. A wireless device still requires an RF receiver to be plugged into your USB port, and sometimes this receiver is just as unsightly as a trailing wire. The average wireless pad will also require battery power, so it will be heavier and the benefits – ie, freedom to wander a distance from the screen, are debatable outside of console land. After all, if you're using a 17" monitor it's unlikely you'll want to sit a significant distance away.

Of course, the other brand of peripheral gravy is force-feedback. More and more games are featuring support for arm-wrenching effects to accompany the action. It all sounds good, but don't be too easily seduced. When it comes to pads the effects often consist of a weedy vibration that's more likely to distract than to immerse you in a gaming experience, so don't pass up a non-FF pad if it's a cheaper option. In full effect, force-feedback joysticks and wheels can genuinely enhance your gaming, but bear in mind that when a device is loaded with the more powerful FF motors, you'll have to

1 JOYSTICKS

Always an essential part of any flight sim enthusiast's armoury, the joystick has been resurrected by the mass appeal of *Battlefield 1942* and its vehicles. With *Battlefield 2* just a few months away, there's never been a better time to invest in a stick. Look for as many programmable buttons as possible, an analogue throttle control and a twisting axis for rudder control. These elements are essential so don't settle for a cheap impostor.

2 JOYPADS

If you own a games console you've got the option to use your existing controllers on your PC. A variety of USB adaptors will enable your PS2, Xbox and Gamecube pads to work on your PC. Over at www.anyware.com.au you'll find some of the best.

SYSTEMS README

>WHY AM I HERE? Because having the right set of gaming gear at your side will enable you to get more from your games.

>IS IT WORTH IT? With hot gear, you'll have the dexterity of...

>IS IT EASY? You'll totally 'get' peripherals if you understand...

>SELL IT TO ME... Until we develop mind powers, peripherals are the way we interface with games. Get the right ones.

PC GAMES ADDICT DICTIONARY THE OED OF GAMING

Analogue › An analogue controller uses a variable signal so the user can adjust the amount of force transmitted. Push harder for more speed, for example.
Digital › Unlike an analogue signal, a digital peripheral is either off or on. Movement will always occur at a single rate of speed. Best used for gear levers or fire buttons.
Calibrate › To adjust a gaming peripheral's axis of movement and sensitivity.
Deadzone › The area of a gaming peripheral where no signal is transmitted and therefore no movement in-game occurs. The smaller the deadzone the more sensitive the peripheral.
Force Feedback › A technology built into peripherals that mirrors the action in-game with a series of vibrating movements, powered by one or more small motors.
X/Y Axis › The horizontal and vertical axis of movement present on all peripherals.

3 STEERING WHEELS

Keen petrolheads should always invest as heavily as possible in quality. Full force-feedback comes at a premium, but it will add significantly to any racing experience. If you can live without force-feedback, then just ensure you look for good compatibility and a solid set of pedals that won't slide away during use. Stick with an established name like Logitech, Saitek or Thrustmaster to be on the safe side. If money is no object then investigate the high-end wheel gods at www.ecci6ooo.com/consumerhome

accommodate yet another power supply under the desk and use up yet another mains power socket.

Above all, compatibility is your main concern. A joystick brimming with bells and whistles is little use to you if it's not going to be recognised by half the games in your collection. Window's plug-and-play facility with USB makes setting up a device incredibly simple, but don't be fooled into thinking that a device recognised by Windows will be automatically compatible with every title. Devices are pre-calibrated when you buy them, so a steering wheel and its pedals will be assigned to a particular axis when you plug it in. Although most devices are set to the normal X axis for horizontal movement and the Y axis for vertical, recognised by every game, some, like Saitek's R220 steering wheel for example, break from the norm. Some games may not recognise particular buttons or even a particular axis, which will mean you'll not be able to put the full power of your peripheral to use.

The more pricey devices from Saitek and Logitech get around such problems by including their own profiling software. This allows you to assign specific commands to each programmable button and create saved profiles for each of your games. Saitek's 'Smart Technology' (SST) software enables you to assign strings of key presses to your device to create macros and can even make it assume the role of a mouse to operate your PC. These tools mean you can use a pad or a stick for a variety of genres. We found a Logitech pad profile for *City of Heroes*, for example, enabling us to comfortably play the MMORPG without a keyboard or mouse. The best way to protect yourself from compatibility problems is to avoid the cheapo options and buy at least a mid-priced device from a well known manufacturer. So choose wisely and happy gaming.

Want a tech topic covered?
Then mail your request to:
asher@derwenthoward.com.au

WHAT NEXT...?

- **Read the reviews over the page and set you sights on some new gear.**
- Now you know what makes a decent peripheral, take out that old joystick and wheel and see if it still measures up.
- **Beware of false force-feedback. Many devices describe themselves as a 'vibrating' or 'feedback' device but are under-powered. The only way to be sure is to read an independent review or test the device in the shop.**
- Ensure that you've got a few USB slots free to connect your new devices.

CURIOSITIES

Peripheral Visions

The inventors' graveyard

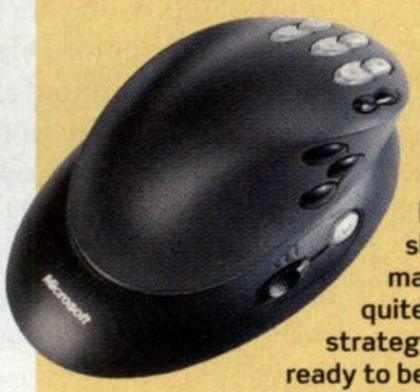
FIREFLY GAMING CHAIR

Manufacturer Complay

We're pretty sure that in the Director's cut of Marathon Man, once Olivier had given up on Dustin Hoffman's dentistry torture, he whipped out one of these. Essentially a sit-on joystick with motorbike-style handlebars, using this in games was like controlling a vaseline-coated eel while sitting astride a cactus.

THE STRATEGIC COMMANDER

Manufacturer Microsoft



Microsoft's left-handed device was aimed straight at RTS gamers, giving them an alternative to the keyboard for their squaddie shortcut keys and macros. With its map scroll feature it actually proved quite effective, but strategy gamers were not ready to be prised from their keyboards. The Commander ran from the field, as did Microsoft soon after.

THE P5 GLOVE

Manufacturer Essential Reality

Virtual reality controllers never became a... uh, reality. The P5 glove was the nearest we came, billed as the peripheral that would allow us to stroke the fur of our *Black & White* monkeys and strangulate our victims as *Hitman*'s Codename 47. It actually made you resemble a cyborg Worzel Gummidge with a waving fetish, and gave you little or no control of what was on screen. We still keep it around to scare the work experience lackeys.

THE SPACE ORB

Manufacturer Gameplay

Like a huge rubber haemerrhoid, the Space Orb was a trackball mutated in a bizarre peripheral experiment. It promised to revolutionise the way we played an FPS. It of course did no such thing and was bounced into oblivion

THE EVO 4D MOUSE

(Not pictured)

Manufacturer n/a

We've no evidence that the Evo Mouse ever made it to the shops and we can only think that we were partly to blame/thank for that. Given the dubious pleasure of putting a prototype through its paces we had to do the right thing and put the unfortunate object out of its misery. It attempted to add an extra dimension to our faithful pointing device by allowing you to lift and lower the mouse on its own base, to gain and lose height in flight sims apparently. As useful as a third nipple and yet, ironically, pointless.

EVOLUTION CONTROL SYSTEM

Manufacturer Gamestar

Anyone remember tilt technology? A no-hit wonder of the peripheral world, it inspired a series of gadgets that gave you control of your gaming characters by making you lean this way and that as if inebriated to the point of collapse, all the while clasping a cheap gamepad. Alternatively, you could limit the ridicule and pick up the device pictured. This one built the pad around what looked like an ill-fitting gardening glove with the fingers chopped off. Brilliant. Except it wasn't.

Who wouldn't feel butch holding this?

Wheel Good

LOGITECH MOMO RACING WHEEL

$199.95

Logitech www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711

With the exception of the flimsy plastic shifters behind the wheel itself, the MOMO Racing Wheel is easily one of the most impressive controllers included in this roundup. Six programmable buttons are located on the face of the wheel and are within easy reach, while the black non-skid rubber covering ensures a solid grip during intense racing.

A stick shifter located to the right of the wheel negates the aforementioned plastic shifter issues nicely (you can choose between the two), and the pedals are equally impressive boasting life-like spring resistance, a comfortable 45 degree angle from the ground and a strong grip that stops them from sliding around on most surfaces.

Installation is a little trickier than on other wheels as the top cover must be removed to access the clamps (tedious if you need to move it frequently), but this is excusable given the overall quality of the product.

Finally, force feedback support provides a realistic yet occasionally distracting touch, while the bundled software enables users to configure the wheel's mechanics and game profiles with ease.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 85%
VALUE 80%
› A great wheel with minor faults.
85%

New kid on the block

GAMEMON SUPER WHEELIE $115

Anyware Computers www.anyware.com.au

(02) 9879 5788

In a racing wheel market dominated by Logitech, it's refreshing to see a new face on the scene. Feature-wise, the Super Wheelie isn't afraid to be innovative boasting a separate gear shifter box that includes both a gear knob and a handbreak. Both of these functions can be mapped to enhance realism in games, but aside from their cheap, plastic feel they tend to become impractical as it's still much easier to click a button than it is to reach over to a plastic handbreak.

Speaking of buttons, the wheel certainly isn't lacking in this regard, with 12 being placed on its face in addition to an 8-way D-Pad. Two of these buttons are positioned on the rim of the wheel itself for easy access during hectic driving.

Pedals are well-spaced with an optimal amount of throw and resistance, and for the most part stay planted on the ground well. Yet while the wheel performed perfectly in most games, in *Need for Speed: Underground 2* and *Colin McRae Rally* it seemed a little over sensitive despite our adjustments in the control panel.

It's a respectable wheel, but if you can spare an extra $85 the Logitech MOMO is a far better purchase.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 78%
VALUE 83%
› A good wheel, but not a great one.
79%

Cheap as chips

JOYTECH NEO S GAMEPAD $34.95

TechPacific

www.techpac.com.au

(02) 9381 6444

Mimicking Microsoft's Xbox controller in many respects, the Neo S proves that a design doesn't need to be radically innovative in order to remain effective. While its button layout - featuring 10 programmable action buttons, two thumbstick buttons and a D-Pad - is virtually identical to that of the Xbox controller, the Neo S is actually slightly smaller, making it much more comfortable to use for those with small hands. Adding to the comfort factor are the rubber grips that help to alleviate perspiration during intense gaming, in addition to the thumbsticks that are well-spaced and boast perfect precision. It's not without its faults though, one of which being the trigger buttons on the back of the controller that appear to have a little too much resistance. It also lacks vibration-feedback support, which is disappointing even though it's not crucial on a game pad.

At $34.95, despite its minor flaws the Neo S is still a bargain for those that wish to have a console gaming experience on the PC.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 80%
VALUE 88%
› An excellent buy for those on a budget.
84%

Buckle your seatbelts

LOGITECH FORMULA VIBRATION FEEDBACK WHEEL

$89.95

Logitech www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711

While the Formula Vibration Feedback (FVF) is less than half the price of its older brother, the MOMO Racing Wheel, it's important to note from the outset that the quality difference between the two is quite significant, as Logitech has skimped on a number of design elements in order to keep costs down. Firstly, rather than the usual clamping technique used to secure the wheel to a desk, the FVF uses three suction cups. This is still quite sturdy, but doesn't offer the solid rigidity of a original clamp design.

Characteristic of lower priced steering wheels, the unit also lacks a gear shifter, instead featuring plastic paddles behind the wheel which tends to detract from the overall racing atmosphere somewhat.

Conversely, to help you feel every crash and bump, the wheel is fitted with dual vibration feedback motors, in addition to a plethora of functions including four primary buttons, six secondary buttons and a D-Pad.

The wheel's shape is ideal for placement on your lap, with the suction cups sliding out of the way creating a curve that moulds to your upper leg nicely. Constructed of solid plastic, the wheel and foot pedals don't have the highest quality feel. Similarly, the gas and break pedals are extremely close together, which can become frustrating, particularly when the entire unit moves around the floor during gameplay as a result of its light weight.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 70%
VALUE 80%
› A decent buy for budget hunters.
75%

You beauty!

LOGITECH WINGMAN FORCE 3D JOYSTICK

$99.95

Logitech www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711

Smaller and more expensive than the other joysticks featured in this roundup, the Wingman Force 3D packs plenty of features into a package that won't consume all of the real estate on your desk.

Buttons are all within easy reach yet not spaced so close together that you'll accidentally hit the wrong one. There are seven programmable buttons, an eight-way hat switch, and a throttle. The stick itself is able to twist and thus double as a rudder control, but this can be locked to avoid accidental movement.

The joystick also features force feedback support, which can be adjusted to suit individual tastes.

The stick is comfortable to use for extended periods of time, with movement feeling fluid, responsive and natural, but a rubber grip would've enhanced this even further.

Hundreds of game profiles can be downloaded from Logitech's website, but adding your own profiles is easy thanks to the bundled profiler.

PC GAMES GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 93%
VALUE 85%
› Almost faultless and comfortable to use.
90%

The magic stick

LOGITECH EXTREME 3D PRO JOYSTICK

$59.95

Logitech www.logitech.com
(02) 9972 3711

PC GAMES SICK DEAL ★★★★★

If you're looking for a bargain and don't mind the lack of force feedback or vibration support, then the Extreme 3D Pro is right up your alley.

The unit features a total of twelve programmable buttons, five more than that of the Wingman Force 3D, but these are positioned well to avoid confusion. For example, there are two fire buttons, one placed naturally below your thumb and the other below your index finger. There's also a throttle switch on the base, and the stick will twist for rudder control as well.

The base is weighted well, staying planted to the desk using four rubber contacts, and its sturdy design means that the joystick can take quite a beating. Movement does feel slightly stiff at times, but the stick's responsiveness is undoubtedly on a par with that of the Force 3D.

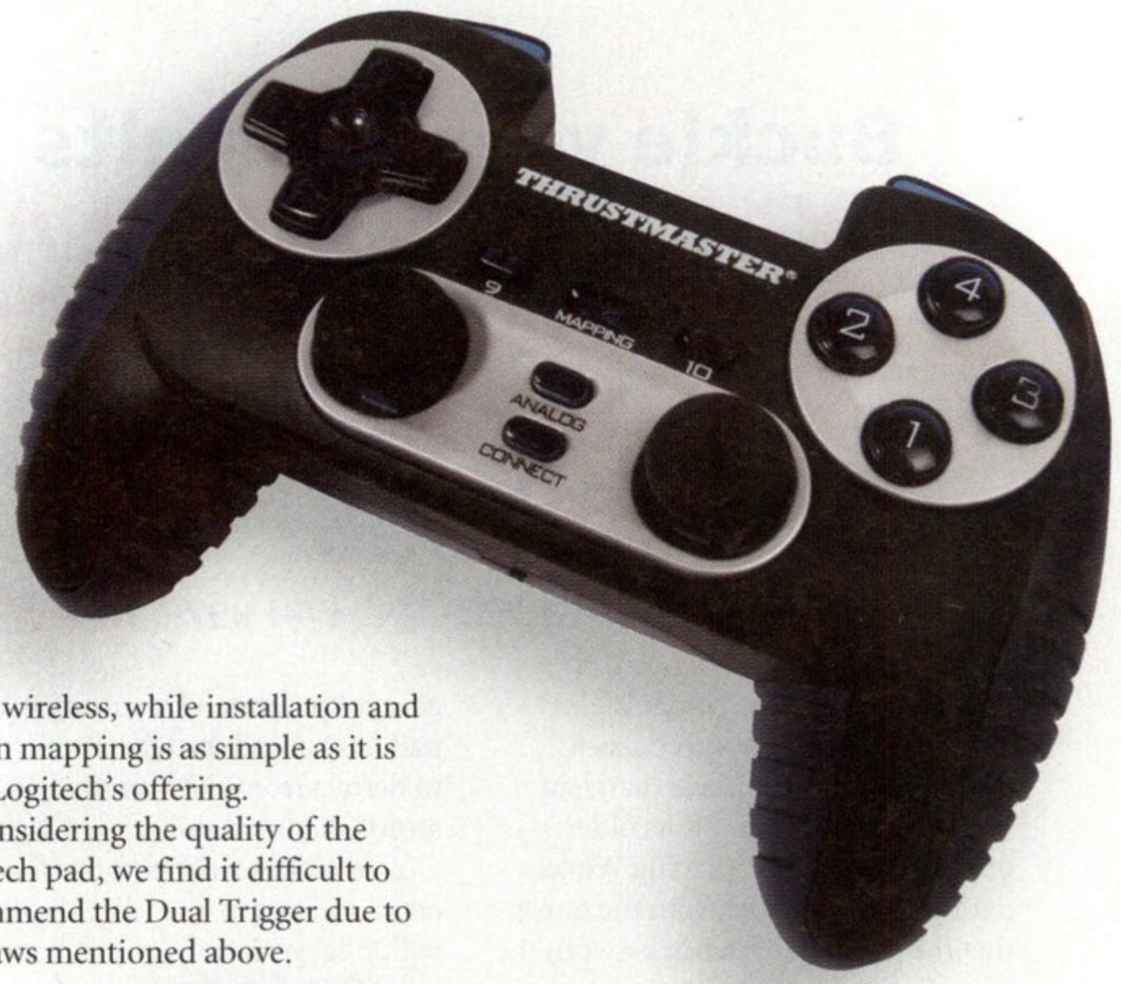
It's comfortable to use for long sessions, and looks great to boot.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 89%
VALUE 89%
› Tops if you don't need force feedback.
89%

Trigger Happy

THRUSTMASTER WIRELESS DUAL TRIGGER $69.95

Ingram Micro www.ingrammicro.com.au (02) 9381 6000



While the Dual Trigger is $20 cheaper than Logitech's offering, the button placement and overall feel will come as a significant let-down to most gamers. Although the number of buttons are identical (eight regular buttons, two triggers, a D-Pad and two analog sticks), their placement is slightly altered.

Firstly, the triggers are fairly small which tends to become tedious to use before long. The left/right buttons on the top of the pad, meanwhile, are awkwardly placed as well, forcing your hands to take a rather unnatural position while playing.

In terms of design, while this may be a matter of preference the shape of the Rumblepad was far more accommodating and comfortable during testing, which only compounds the button placement issues further.

On the positive side, the pad's response was latency-free despite being wireless, while installation and button mapping is as simple as it is with Logitech's offering.

Considering the quality of the Logitech pad, we find it difficult to recommend the Dual Trigger due to the flaws mentioned above.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 70%
VALUE 75%
›Killed by awkward button placement.
73%

Good Vibrations

LOGITECH CORDLESS RUMBLEPAD 2 $79.95

Logitech www.logitech.com (02) 9972 3711

Baring a striking resemblance to the ubiquitous PS2 controller, the Cordless Rumblepad 2 offers a familiar design and copious functionality for the PC gamer.

Like the Thrustmaster pad, the Rumblepad is wireless yet encounters minimal lag issues as long as you stay within around 15 feet of the receiver. Although it runs on batteries, the average set should last for around one month of intense play (according to multiple user reviews), which is impressive to say the least.

PS2 owners should be familiar with the Rumblepad's array of buttons, consisting of 10 programmable action buttons (including dual triggers) and two analog sticks. Strangely, the frame of these analog sticks is square rather than circular, which tends to impede on fluidity somewhat but isn't a huge deterrent. Otherwise, the button layout is superb.

In addition, being a wireless pad, the Rumblepad 2 is slightly heavier than wired gamepads, but not so heavy that your wrists feel like they're going to drop off after an hour of use.

The strength of the vibration feedback function is perfectly balanced, while the shape off the pad should fit most hands comfortably.

Like most Logitech products, adding game profiles from their site is an absolute breeze.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 92%
VALUE 80%
›The most impressive gamepad tested.
90%

Keep It Simple Stupid

THRUSTMASTER USB JOYSTICK $39.95

Ingram Micro www.ingrammicro.com.au

(02) 9381 6000

Although the Thrustmaster USB Joystick isn't new or even that impressive, its extremely low price and simple feature-set make it an ideal choice for beginners or those that don't necessarily require the eccentric set of buttons offered by the more expensive models.

The buttons are located mainly towards the top of the stick. They're positioned quite logically, though a little too close together for comfort. There are three regular action buttons, the mandatory trigger and an 8-way hat switch, while the throttle is located on the base of the unit.

The stick itself is quite comfortable to hold, but it won't twist for rudder control which is sure to deter hardcore flight-sim fans. Similarly, the base is fairly light and thus, doesn't always stay firmly planted to the desk which, suffice it to say, becomes a source of frustration before long.

While hardcore gamers need not apply, if you're on a tight budget the Thrustmaster USB joystick can easily handle games with a simple control, or even more involved titles if you're willing to use the keyboard as well.

PC GAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 70%
VALUE 85%
›Hardcore gamers need not apply.
74%

THE WINNER!

Hadoken!

X- ARCADE DUAL CONTROLLER $269.95

@HomeDownUnder www.athomedownunder.com (64) 9576 7539

X-Arcade products have long been regarded as the bee's knees as far as gaming controllers are concerned. Traditionally focusing predominantly on console gear, X-Arcade's lineup now includes a number of PC controllers, one of which is the nostalgic "Dual Arcade Joystick".

Those that lined up in Timezone to play *Mortal Kombat* or *Street Fighter* as a kid will immediately recognise the unit's design, which appears to be pulled straight from your typical arcade machine. Constructed using injected wood, the controller is extremely sturdy and, as the name suggests, can accommodate two players simultaneously, much like a regular arcade machine.

Each side features a joystick and eight buttons - perfectly suited to arcade classics that can be relived through an emulator such as MAME, or even modern fighting and sports titles. What's more, the beauty of an arcade setup as opposed to a typical joystick is that the smaller size of the stick itself makes playing arcade classics and sporting simulations far simpler and more enjoyable, whereas regular joysticks are designed primarily for the flight sim enthusiast.

On the whole, the controller is extremely comfortable to use for extended periods of time, although two players of a larger than average build bashing away simultaneously can become slightly cramped.

Installation is as simple as plugging it into a spare USB port, and software configuration is painless as well. MAME features in-built key mapping for X-Arcade products, while controls for modern games can be programmed with ease and saved to the controller's onboard memory.

Unsurprisingly, the Dual Controller is the most expensive product featured in this roundup, but it's also about as close as you'll get to a true arcade experience on the PC. Suffice it to say, it's definitely a must-have for any fan of arcade gaming. In fact, X-Arcade is so sure about the quality of its product that it even bundles a fully serviced, lifetime warranty.

PCGAMES ADDICT
PERFORMANCE 95%
VALUE 85%
93%
› A must-have for arcade gamers.

PCGAMES ADDICT GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

THE SCORE - WHY IT WON

While they're all game controllers, the fact that there's such a variety of products in this category (joysticks, gamepads, steering wheels, etc) made it quite difficult to select an overall winner. However, after weeks of testing it became quite clear that the X-Arcade controller's versatility and immaculate build quality were unparalleled as far as this roundup is concerned. Another key factor that led to our decision is the fact that it's the first controller we've seen to date that allows gamers to experience classic arcade gaming the way it used to be. That's not to say that it can't play modern games well, as sports titles such as FIFA 2005 were also raised to a whole new level with this controller in place.

Testing was conducted using our review rig as listed on the hardware introduction page, and all "benchmarks" were performed on the same desk to ensure a level playing field. Endless amounts of games were pulled from the PCGA archives, some a number of years old, in order to ensure that each controller type was done its share of justice. Some of these games included *Need for Speed: Underground 2, Colin McRae Rally 2005, Freespace 2, Lock On: Modern Air Combat, Microsoft Flight Simulator 2004, MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries, RalliSport Challenge, Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4, Battlefield 1942* (for testing joysticks in aircraft flight), *NASCAR, FIFA 2005* and a variety of arcade titles emulated through MAME.

With such a vast spectrum of games, any faults hidden within each controller rose to the surface quickly.

If you were to take one piece of advice away from this roundup, remember that it's often worth spending a little extra (unless you're on a tight budget), as the features that come with the more expensive models make for a much richer, atmospheric playing experience.

The Breakdown:

Best Overall
X-Arcade Dual Controller
Arcade is back baby!

Best Value
Logitech Extreme 3D Pro
Command the skies without mortgaging the house.

Best to play Frisbee
Thrustmaster Wireless Dual Trigger
It doesn't just "control" the game....It IS the game!

Back to the drawing board

INTEL P4 660 & P4 EE 3.73GHZ

$TBA

Intel Australia www.intel.com.au (02) 9937 5800

Nipping at the heels of AMD's Athlon 64/FX range, Intel's latest Pentium 4 offering boasts numerous upgrades over its predecessor (the 5xx series), but none that will prove significantly useful to hardened gamers.

Available in two flavours, the regular 6xx series (ranging from 3GHz to 3.6GHz) and the P4 Extreme Edition 3.73GHz, the primary upgrade boasted by Intel's marketing department is a 100% increase in L2 cache, bumping the total up to 2MB. However, while this will undoubtedly increase performance as the need to access slower system memory is reduced, an increase in cache size also carries the unfortunate consequence of raising latency, particularly since it'll be more difficult to locate individual pieces of data.

This trade-off is best illustrated on our test bench, where we compared two 3.6GHz Pentium 4 processors, one of which was based on the 5xx series and featured 1MB of L2 cache and the other being the new P4 660 with 2MB of L2 cache. Despite looking like a significant advantage on paper, in reality the additional cache provides no more than a 10% increase in performance; and in gaming applications such as *Doom 3* and *Unreal Tournament 2004* this is even smaller at less than 4%.

Aside from the increased cache, the 6xx boasts two more technological advantages - Enhanced Intel Speedstep Technology and 64-bit application support. The former is quite useful in that it enables cooler operation by dynamically decreasing clock speed and voltage based on load, while the latter provides no immediate advantages since we won't see a 64-bit version of Windows XP until well into the second quarter of this year. That said, one trade-off to Intel's Speedstep Technology is that even at maximum load, performance is slightly lower than it is when this feature is disabled.

Being based on the same core, the aforementioned new additions to the Pentium 4 core are present in both the regular 6xx series and the EE 3.73GHz. In fact, the only real motivation to purchase the Extreme Edition is a slightly higher clock speed and front side bus (1066MHz compared to 800MHz on the 6xx). While the Extreme Edition used to boast a huge cache advantage which translated into far superior performance, this has now been eradicated making the regular P4 a far more logical purchase as far as the wallet is concerned.

At the end of the day, all of the above facts point to the same question - why would a gamer purchase either of these two new processors, particularly considering that the prices on the 5xx range are set to decrease tremendously? The answer may be as simple as future-proofing your system for 64-bit support, but with Intel set to release multi-core processors in 2006, there's certainly no immediate need to rush to start an upgrade frenzy now.

Furthermore, our tests also showed that the Athlon 64 4000+ still boasts a tremendous performance lead over the P4, particularly in gaming applications.

PC GAMES ADDICT

PERFORMANCE 70%
VALUE NA%

› Wait for dual-core.

65%

The Gucci of memory
CORSAIR XMS XPERT
$574

Altech www.altech.com.au (02) 9735 5655

Although DDR2 has surpassed regular DDR for Intel platforms, AMD is sticking with the latter for at least another year. This coupled with the fact that the majority of us are yet to upgrade to the new memory standard makes it unsurprising that manufacturers continue to refine their DDR product lines.

As far as enthusiasts and overclockers are concerned, Corsair memory has always been a top choice due to their ability to run at extremely low timings (read: data is accessed faster) and their high overclocking yield. Its new Xpert 1GB DDR400 memory pair only further implants this view, though like designer clothing this quality comes at an added cost.

The most prominent new feature on the Xpert range is the 10-digit display crested atop each module. This can output a plethora of interesting information such as memory speed (handy for monitoring overlcocking attempts), memory voltage and memory temperature (either in Fahrenheit or Celsius), as well as up to three custom messages that are 23 characters in length. Confirguration is achieved through the memory dashboard software included in the package, which enables users to control the scrolling speed, direction and display time as well. In addition to the 10-digit display, there's also a set of activity LEDs that enable users to monitor how hard their memory is working for them.

While the displays won't be very useful for those who are without a windowed case, the aforementioned memory dashboard software is able to output the same handy information to the desktop.

At a speed of 400MHz (PC3200), the modules are able to run at timings of 2-2-2-5 (these settings can be adjusted in the BIOS), which is definitely the lowest we've seen from a DDR module. With these timings, we were able to overclock the modules to 440MHz - again very impressive considering how difficult it is to attain these timings even at the default speed of 400MHz.

Corsair's Xpert memory is sure to deliver incredible value to the avid overclocker, but for everyone else a cheaper kit would likely be a far more logical choice. Having said that, it caters to its niche well enough to earn our coveted Gold Gear award.

PCGAMES GOLD GEAR ★★★★★

PCGAMES
PERFORMANCE 95%
VALUE 75%
›Unbeatable in its chosen niche.
90%

More than a cup of coffee
ASUS S-PRESSO SP111 $599

Cassa Australia www.asus.com.au 1300 278 788

If you can disregard the corny coffee references in Asus' PR - "Just like a cup of Espresso, this all-new desktop solution is compact and rich in flavour" - the S-presso boasts copious functionality and style that'll complement any living room nicely.

By far, the S-presso's most interesting feature is its ability to play audio and video files on the fly without booting into the operating system, avoiding the tedious waiting time that's plagued previous SFF PCs. In fact, you won't even need a keyboard as it also features a touch control panel (backlit by LEDs for night-time movie sessions) as well as an intuitive remote control.

Based on the 865G chipset, the S-presso supports socket 478 Pentium 4 processors up to 3.4GHz, as well as DDR400 memory and integrated graphics. Unfortunately, this means that it doesn't support the new Pentium 4 chips (reviewed in this issue), or any of the new socket 775 models for that matter. However, considering that the system has been designed from the ground up for use as a home entertainment system, cutting edge performance isn't a necessity. Gaming is still perfectly viable, as the integrated graphics solution can be replaced using the included AGP 8x slot.

As with most barebones PCs, onboard features are prominent and include a 10/100 Ethernet chip, an ADI 6-channel audio controller, a TV tuner and a card reader supporting all of the popular standards. In addition, four USB 2.0 ports are included, as well as a single PCI slot that's very useful for those that want to replace the onboard sound solution.

An integrated 802.11g wireless chip would've been desirable in order to allow users to stream multimedia content throughout the house, but this activity is still in its infancy pending the release of wireless technologies that possess greater bandwidth.

Finally, installation is painless thanks to Asus' handy quick start guide and the machine's screwless design, while configuration is a breeze due to the plethora of software contained on the bundled CDs.

Although it's not state-of-the-art in terms of feature-set, for use primarily as a home entertainment system the S-presso SP111 is among the best in its class.

PCGAMES
PERFORMANCE 88%
VALUE 80%
›Say goodbye to the old hi-fi
87%

LOCK AND LOAD YOUR PC

This month: how to add SATA storage (and fill it with games)

BY JON HICKS

DO IT... *THIS WEEKEND!*

Tweak UT2004

FINE TUNE

PROBLEM No cool FPS games out at the moment
REMEDY Tweak *UT2004*, return to joyous shooting and plentiful mods
RESULT Threat of fresh air and exercise averted

We're a bit light on new releases at the moment, but there's a rich seam of mods to sustain us through this harsh and unforgiving start to 2005. You can prepare yourself with a few hacks to modder's favourite *UT2004*, which is bristling with advanced twiddly bits.

Browse to your UT2004 system directory and seek out the files UT2004.ini and User.ini – back 'em up first, then open up UT2004.ini in Notepad. Performance-wise, there aren't many improvements that can't be made in the in-game settings, but if you want to replace long loading times with a few stutters in-game, you can set UsePrecaching=true under [D3DDrv.D3DRenderDevice] and [AlAudio.AlAudioSubsystem].

If you just want to customise how you play the game, however, then there are oodles of options to fiddle with. Start by tweaking the loading screens; you can skip the nVidia logo on boot-up by changing LocalMap=NvidiaLogo.ut2 to LocalMap=NoIntro.ut2. (Incidentally, if you want to change the standard *UT2004* graphic, that's even easier – just open the UT2004/Help directory and replace the UT2004Logo.bmp file with another 8-bit bitmap of your own choosing.) Back in UT2004.ini you can place the voice taunts within easier reach by scrolling down to the [XInterface.Extended Console] entry. Setting bSpeechMenuUseLetters=True means you can bind letters, rather than numbers, to the taunt menu – you can change which letters you use for specific taunts by changing the IK_ entries beneath this entry.

ON THE DISC Keep your PC in peak condition with our hand-picked selection of apps and utilities > Toolkit

For weapon control tweaks, head over to User.ini. The Engine.Input section holds the key assignments. You can create a quick weapon-switch by looking under Engine.Input, finding a key that's going spare, H=, for example, and adding the line pipedweaponswitch X | pipedweaponswitch Z where X and Z are the numbers of the weapons. H=piped weaponswitch 5 | pipedweaponswitch 7 would switch from Link Gun to Flak Cannon, for example.

Elsewhere, if you still haven't got round to completing the single-player game, you can activate the secret characters that it unlocks by finding the TotalUnlockedCharacters= line and adding Malcolm;ClanLord;Xan to it.

UTILITY OF THE MONTH

NT PASSWORD AND REGISTRY EDITOR

There's nothing quite like the bowel-chilling horror of your PC demanding a password that you don't know. The Administrator password offers a route around this all-too familiar snag, but if you've forgotten it since you built your PC then this great little program will set you right. Simply unzip it to a floppy disc and boot from it, and it'll blank out the Admin password. Operation isn't guaranteed and your NTFS encrypted files will be junked, but as a last-ditch resort it's extremely helpful. Get it from **http://home.eunet.no/~pnordahl/ntpasswd**

DO IT... *THIS MONTH!*

Install a new boot drive

RE-TOOLING

PROBLEM You can't install Windows onto your new SATA hard drive
REMEDY Brandish ready-made floppy
RESULT PC both works and offers lots of storage

Serial ATA hard drives boast all sorts of improvements over sluggish old IDE, but they do stumble when it comes to installing Windows because – unlike IDE - they aren't automatically recognised by your PC.

To get round this, you'll need a floppy drive. If you're working with a ready-made PC that already has one, not a problem. If you're building a PC from scratch, dig up an old one and blow the dust of it. Plug it in and check that it works. Make sure that the BIOS is set to recognise that it's there and that the light stays off; if it's constantly on, you've got the connecting cable upside down. While you're in the BIOS, check to see that you are set to boot from the CD drive and that your BIOS recognises your SATA drive. You should get some indication that it's been recognised when you boot up, although you might need a sharp eye to spot it while the BIOS text flashes past.

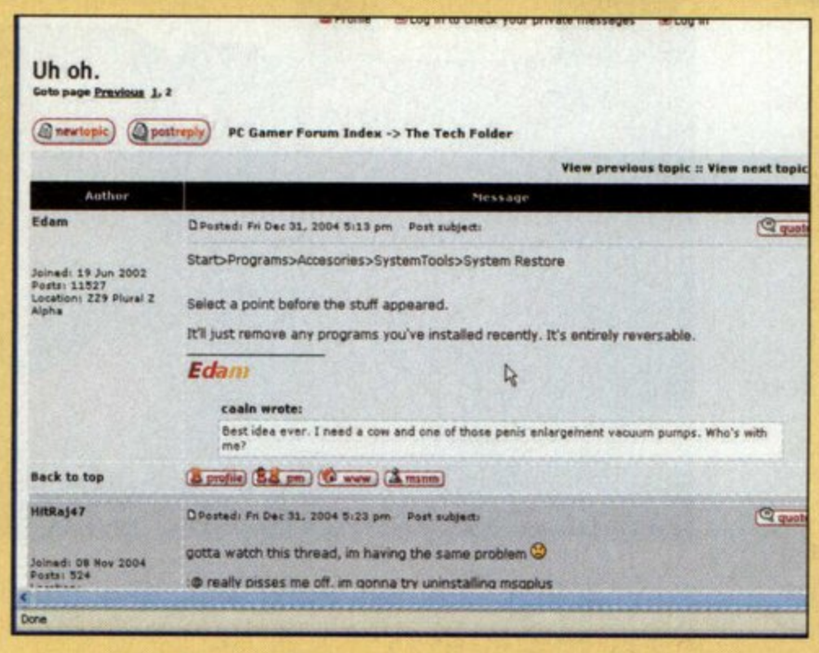
Installing more hard drives is guaranteed to impress your 'friends'...

Next, prepare a floppy disc. If you're lucky, your motherboard came with a floppy disc containing the SATA driver. If the manufacturer was too cheap to include it, have a look at the driver CD-ROM or look at the Support area of their website. This will provide the driver file which you can copy onto your floppy disc.

With this ready, you can put your Windows XP CD-ROM in the drive and boot up the PC. Windows installation will begin. Watch the bottom of the screen closely: when it goes blue and starts loading Windows Setup, you'll need to press F6 when prompted to load a "third party RAID" driver from floppy. You can then select your SATA driver.

Essential Tech Tips

SUBJECT: Uh oh, Spyware


Uh oh.
Goto page Previous 1, 2
newtopic
postreply
PC Gamer Forum Index -> The Tech Folder
View previous topic :: View next topic
Author
Message
Edam
Posted: Fri Dec 31, 2004 5:13 pm Post subject:
Start>Programs>Accesories>SystemTools>System Restore
Joined: 19 Jun 2002
Posts: 11527
Location: Z29 Plural Z Alpha
Select a point before the stuff appeared.
It'll just remove any programs you've installed recently. It's entirely reversable.
Edam
coaln wrote:
Best idea ever. I need a cow and one of those penis enlargement vacuum pumps. Who's with me?
Back to top
profile
pm
www
msnm
HitRaj47
Posted: Fri Dec 31, 2004 5:23 pm Post subject:
Joined: 08 Nov 2004
Posts: 524
gotta watch this thread, im having the same problem
really pisses me off. im gonna try uninstalling msnplus
Done

Homepage hijacked? Undeletable icons littering your desktop? You're not alone. You and several of the forumites should probably form a gang.

1 What is Spyware? Spyware is Internet jargon for Advertising Supported software (Adware). It is a way for shareware authors to make money from a product, other than by selling it to the users. While this is great in that it saves you from paying for the software, the downside is that the advertising companies also install additional tracking software on your system, which is continuously sending data about your usage patterns to a remote server.

2 How It Starts The most common way to contract spyware is by installing a piece of software downloaded from the Internet. Often during installation there'll be a set of tickboxes that allows users to select which specific software components they'd like to install (they're all ticked by default), one of which is usually a spyware application (a popular example is Kazaa). Since most users bypass this as they're in a rush to get the software installed as quickly as possible, you usually unwittingly agree to have the spyware installed on your PC in the first place. Another way spyware can squirm its way on to your system is through questionable websites (usually porn or warez sites).

3 The Symptoms A common symptom of spyware infection is the presence of undeletable items on your desktop. Typical names for these include "Website hosting", "Bingo", "Casino Online", "Printer Cartridges", "Card Games", "Poker" and "Travel". Another is that your homepage in Internet Explorer could mysteriously change to some sort of search engine or advertising portal.

Solution 1 The easiest way to fix a spyware issue is through the use of Systems Restore, a tool that's built into Windows XP. Navigate to Start>Programs>Accessories>System Tools>System Restore, and choose a restore point that you know is before the date of infection. Note that this process is completely reversible.

Solution 2 Download an anti-spyware program that will search your computer and automatically remove any spyware infections it finds. Our favourites are Adaware (www.adaware.com) and Spybot: Search and Destroy (www.spybot.info).

Solution 3 Dumping Internet Explorer for Firefox (www.mozilla.org) defeats quite a lot of spyware but downloaded software can still infect you.

DO IT... THIS MONTH!

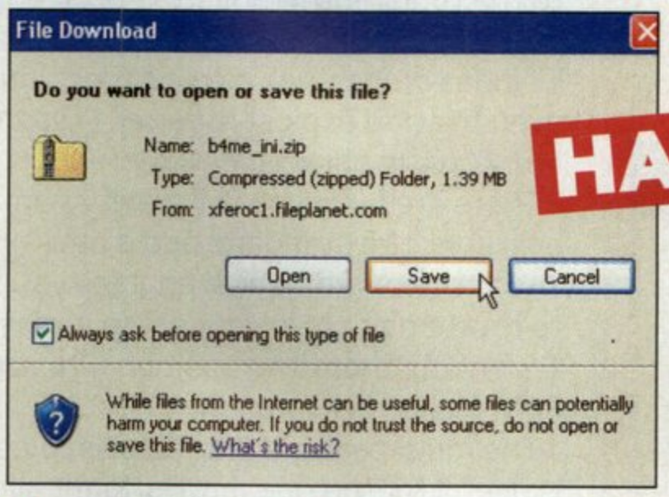
Modifying Middle-Earth

RED EYE

PROBLEM ***Battle for Middle-Earth*** **delayed due to technical difficulties**
REMEDY Deceive the installation program and adjust in-game settings
RESULT Orcs unleashed

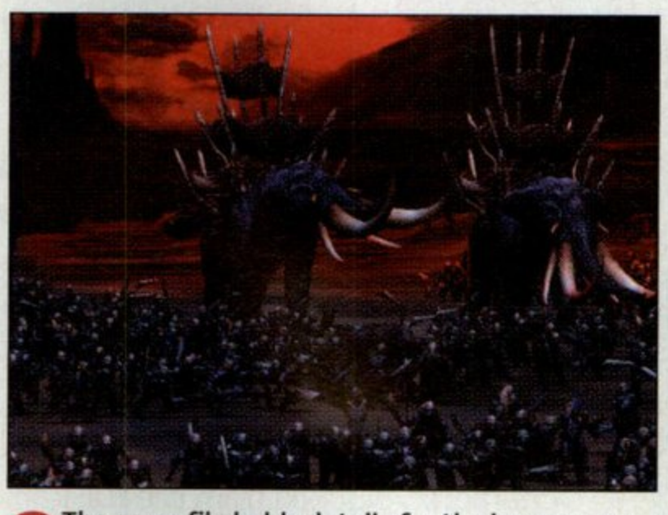
If *Battle for Middle-Earth* stops at random points – or installs, but only gives a brief glimpse of the splash screen and a swift trip to the desktop – then it's likely the CD-ROM isn't being read properly. Hitting Ctrl+Alt+Del and ending all non-essential processes can help. If it regularly chokes on something non-essential like a movie file, copy another file of the same type and give it the same name – it might confuse *BfME* into working.

Alternatively, if you've got about 15Gb of space, EA suggest copying all the discs onto your hard drive. Create a folder called 'Disk Images' and within it four more called Disk1, Disk2, Disk3 and Disk4. Then stick each disc in the drive, copy the contents of each into the appropriate folder and try again. Finally, try running the recovery app from **www.softwarepatch.com/software/cd-recovery.html** to resolve any errors.


File Download
Do you want to open or save this file?
Name: b4me_ini.zip
Type: Compressed (zipped) Folder, 1.39 MB
From: xferoc1.fileplanet.com
Open
Save
Cancel
Always ask before opening this type of file
While files from the Internet can be useful, some files can potentially harm your computer. If you do not trust the source, do not open or save this file. What's the risk?

1 You need the INI files to edit the game – from www.fileplanet.com/dl.aspx?/rpgplanet/memw/mods/b4me_ini.zip. Copy the ini directory into \The Battle for Middle-earth (tm)\data\.

2 Open gamedata.ini and look up the section headed ::CAMPAIGN BONUS CAPS. Change the numbers of Command Points to increase or decrease difficulty.



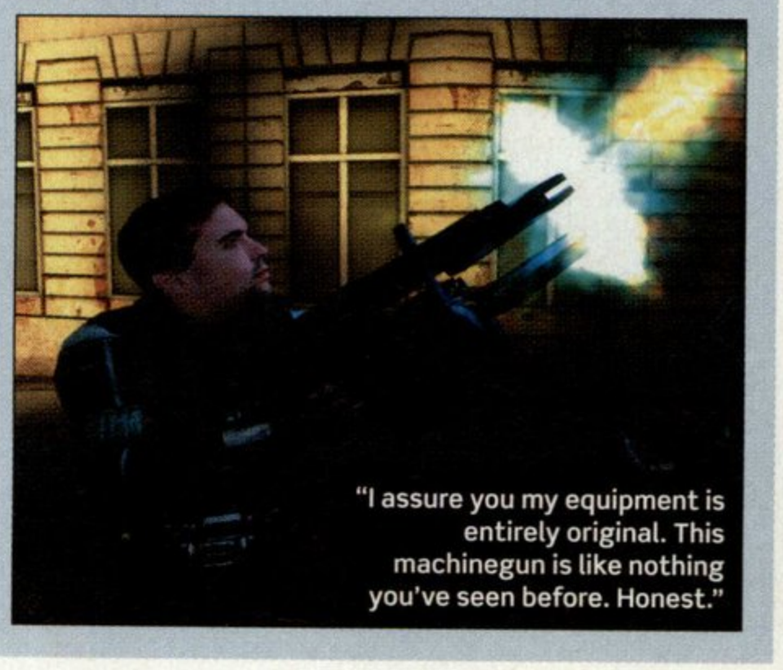
3 The same file holds details for the heroes: you can edit build costs, attack delays and experience development, and for generic units you can adjust strengths, build costs, and build times.

4 Finally, right click the desktop shortcut, choose Properties and click the Target box. Add -preferLocalFiles to the end of the line, click OK, and your changes will appear next time you start *BfME*.

TOO EMBARRASSED TO ASK...

"WHAT IS... OEM?"

It's an Original Equipment Manufacturer, which is the reason that anything marked OEM is a bit cheaper. As the brusque name suggests, OEM kit is intended for PC manufacturers, so it lacks the packaging and accessories you'd get with a retail version, but you save a bit of cash as well. Alternatively, you'll find it mentioned in support documents that tell you to contact your PC's OEM in case of problems. This, of course, translates as "We've no idea what's gone wrong, piss off and ask the manufacturer." Good to know, I'm sure you'll agree.



"I assure you my equipment is entirely original. This machinegun is like nothing you've seen before. Honest."

ON THE DISCS

Featuring

- **1** full expansion pack
- **10** playable demos
- **35** mods & maps
- **15** must-see movies
- **30** handy utilities
- **5Gb+ of goodies!**

THE PCGA PROMISE

- We pack every disc with the best new PC entertainment every month. If you can't find an item you were expecting, it probably just missed our deadline and you can bet we'll have it on next issue's disc.
- **PCs are inherently unreliable. Sad but true. So if something on your disc doesn't work then we'll try help sort it out. See our Troubleshooter guide over the page to see what help we can offer.**
- We scour the earth to bring you the finest playable demos, movies, mods and utilities that PC gaming can provide. But if we miss a trick then tell our Disc Editor all about it. Email **dan@derwenthoward.com.au**

TROUBLE SHOOTER

Is your coverdisc playing up? Help is at hand

1 If the menu program does not automatically start, the autorun feature may be disabled on your PC. Go to the START/RUN command on the task-bar and type D:\IERUNNER.EXE or D:\MENU\INDEX.HTM (where D is the drive letter).

2 For problems with an individual demo or application, refer to the Help section on the disc. Also ensure your drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.

3 If your disc is defective then return it to the address below, along with a description of the fault and an SAE:
Disc Department, PC Games Addict, Reply Paid 1035, Bondi Junction, NSW 1355

4 As soon as we discover issues with programs on the disc, we will post solutions on the **Disc Support forum**. Check here to see if there's a quick fix:
http://forums.derwenthoward.com.au/viewforum.php?f=5

We can only provide assistance with technical problems *directly* related to our coverdiscs. The PCGA discs have been thoroughly tested and certified 'virus free', but we recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on ANY software before running it. Derwent Howard Pty Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system which may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them.

CD & DVD

GARRY'S MOD

WHAT IS IT?

The latest version (7a) of the *Half-Life 2* mod that gives you a whole bunch of *HL2* objects and ragdolls, and the power to pose them, stick wheels and thrusters on them, and generally abuse them with game physics.

DEMO GOALS

There are no objectives, or even enemies. Your goal is to have fun. You will.

PERFORMANCE TIPS

- Your first task in *Garry's Mod* is to get used to the tools. You're able to drop in any of the objects from the game into your scene. That includes crates, vehicles, Striders, manhacks, even the odd explosive barrel. Press 'Q' to bring up the object menu.
- There are two types of gravity gun available: the standard, and a new 'manipulator gun' which enables you to rotate objects in your grasp (press 'E'), and fix them into position (Press the right mouse button).
- The multi-tool, cleverly disguised as a pistol, is useful for the fine details. Right click to pull up a menu where you can manipulate the very fibre of your chosen object's being. Maybe replace their flesh with jelly. Then set them on fire. That even goes for the ragdolls. You can even randomise their facial expressions – with just the right lip-curl you could mistake the G-Man for Elvis.
- The final weapon in your physics toolkit is the wonderful 'Thruster Gun'. This is used to drop high-velocity canisters into your world, which you can then attach to any object you want to.

Pretty-looking bunch? Well we'll soon fix that.

DEMO CHALLENGE
Build a catapult capable of flinging a human 50 yards.

README

Developer Garry/Valve
Publisher Vivendi **Requires** *Half-Life 2*

CONTROLS **W, A, S, D** movement ■ **Right Mouse** context menu ■ **Left Mouse** fire ■ **E** hold object ■ **1** select manipulator ■ **2** select Multi-tool ■ **3** select shotguns ■ **Q** spawn menu ■ **Space** jump ■ **C** crouch

DVD

EVERQUEST II CHARACTER CREATION

WHAT IS IT?

The tool used to create your *EverQuest II* character, plucked from the full game and plonked on your disc. The tool enables you to choose alignment, race and sex before prising open the creative juice cartons with a series of sliders and palettes that let you work on the finer points.

WHAT CAN I DO?

First off you could try tweaking the graphical options to ensure you can see your character in all its full, bump-mapped glory. A Troll looks better when you can see every zit on his face. Click on Options and ramp the character texture resolution up to maximum.

Next up it's really just a case of diving in. Bear in mind that by selecting good or evil you're opening up a whole string of different races. Click on Evil and you'll unlock some macabre facial accessories that would have Marilyn Manson flinching.

You've go to play around with *all* the race types here. Each one has its own custom options. Predictably Humans are a tad boring with just the basic head, hair and body options, but if you select a Dwarf you can play around with tattoos and an array of beard types that Ross can only dream of achieving.

If you're stuck for inspiration you can just hit the randomise all button until you've something that catches your eye. Click the unlock all button if you want a random character.

Once you're happy with your handiwork you can save your character to disc. Then, if you're making your bow on a live server you can install the game client and have it ready and waiting for some EQ questing.

README

Developer Sony Online Entertainment
Publisher Ubisoft **Requires** Some creative flair

Mmmm. And what alignment might you be my friend?

CD & DVD

DANGEROUS WATERS

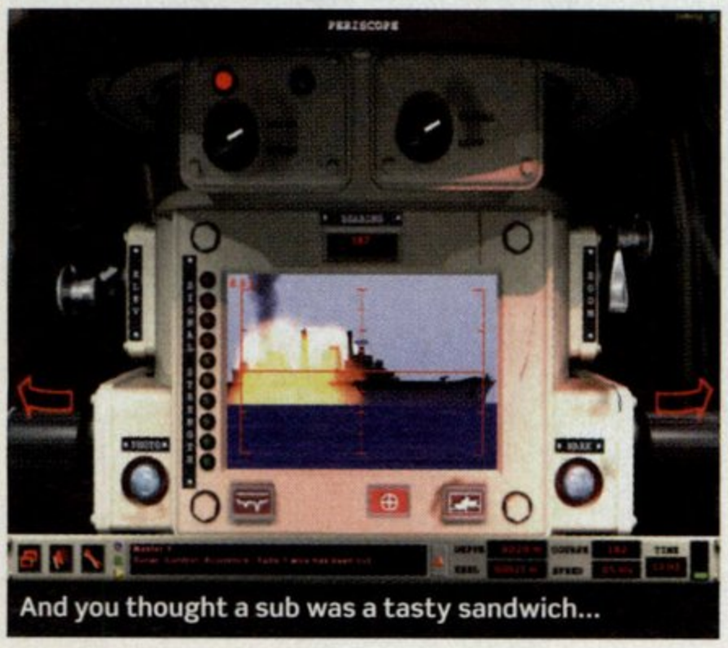
WHAT IS IT?

Painfully accurate naval sim demo featuring two battles. In the first you control a Vologda SS4402 Kilo sub, in the second an MH-60R Seahawk chopper.

DEMO CHALLENGE
Complete the MH-60 chopper mission with autopilot switched off.

DEMO GOALS

In the sub demo, you must intercept and sink a cargo ship before it resupplies the enemy. In the chopper demo, take out a ship that's travelling through the Tsushima Strait off Japan and Korea.



And you thought a sub was a tasty sandwich...

PERFORMANCE TIPS

›First off, keep moving. If you sit still for too long in either mission, doing nothing, you're a bullet magnet.

›In the Kilo demo – get on the transporting ship's tail as fast as you can. Use the radar to pinpoint the target, shift the rudder into position and bellow "All ahead full!" Sinking the target requires you to get in the firing room so familiarise yourself with the icon and be ready to reduce speed and assume position for the attack.

›In the MH-60 demo – the radar is your only tool to detect the target and guide your arsenal. Using the helicopter's autopilot function all you need do is indicate the target on your green cockpit screen and hit 'fly to'. If, however, you want a little more control switch the autopilot off but ensure that you have enough throttle. To fire your weapons, simply select the desired warhead and death click the foe onscreen.

README

Developer Sonalysts Combat Simulations
Publisher Battlefront **Requires** 1GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 64Mb RAM 3D card

CONTROLS **Kilo: 1 - 0** set speed ■ **Shift + 1** surface ■ **Shift + 2** periscope depth ■ **Shift 1-5** depth shallow ■ **MH-60: Joystick** movement ■ **Space** flares ■ **Shift + Space** fire chaff ■ **V** change pilot view

DVD

PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

DEMO CHALLENGE
Can you complete the level without using the Sands?

WHAT IS IT?

A classic platform game reborn as a 3D jumping, slashing adventure. Travel to the Far East to battle mummy-like bad guys and recover the Sands of Time.

DEMO GOALS

Flick and fling the Prince through the trapeze-laden corridors, and out, into safety.

PERFORMANCE TIPS

›The Sands are precious. Only use them as you're plummeting to your doom or feel an enemy blade in your chest. They'll send you back a couple of vital seconds in time.

›After the monkey swinging you'll come to a lever. If it's turned twice the platform to your right will begin elevating. From there, jump between the two walls on the left, then jump from wall to wall in order to scale them.

›To cut the 'mid-demo' boss down to size, hack at his calves until he kneels in pain then jump onto his back and attack his head.

›In the second, wetter world, there's a tricky horizontal spiked spinning beam you have to leap over. You won't be able to do this using conventional muscle, so go back to the last pummelling stone brick that springs from the wall and use it as a launch platform for a wall run.

README

Developer In-house
Publisher Ubisoft **Requires** 1GHz CPU, 256Mb RAM, 128Mb 3D card

Slice and dice your way through a haunted castle.

CONTROLS **W, A, S, D** movement ■ **Right Mouse** roll/jump/reject/accept ■ **Left Mouse** attack ■ **E** grab/second weapon attack ■ **C** pick up/throw/climb down/cancel ■ **R** rewind/slowdown

DISC EXTRAS

More than just demos...

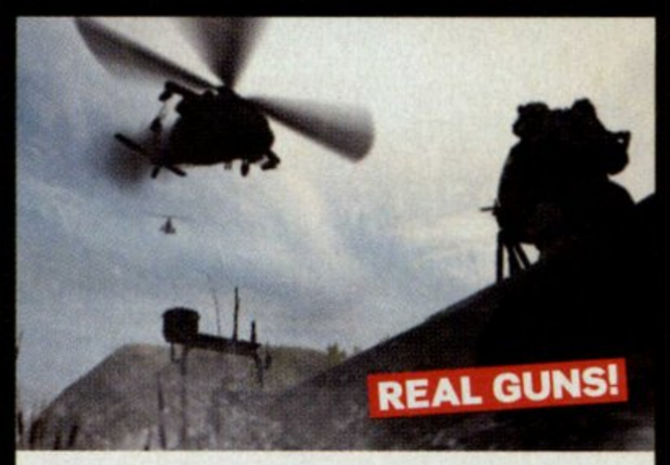
+29 mods & maps

We skim the cream off the *Half-Life 2* mod community, along with *Doom 3*, *Battle For Middle-Earth* and *World of Warcraft*.

ENEMY TERRITORY FORTRESS Frags come free.

+15 movies

Some hot footage of the games of tomorrow (or later even) including *Battlefield 2*, *25 to Life*, *Stolen*, *Close Combat* and more!



BATTLEFIELD 2 Wage war out on the wetlands.

+7 Galleries

Screenshots of some of the prettiest PC games around: *Black & White 2*, *Darwinia*, *Madagascar*, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R*, *Matrix Online*.

STALKER: Facing mutants? You need a gun...

+Patches

› The largest and latest fixes for you: *Painkiller*, *Star Wars: Battlefront*, *C&C Generals - Zero Hour* & more.

+Extra features

› SHAREWARE SELECTION - Seven slices of shareware gaming bliss, including 'N', which you can read more about in our Extra-Life section on page 75.

› FULL VIETCONG EXPANSION - Got *Vietcong*? Now you've got *Red Dawn*, an official expansion, free with this issue of PC Games Addict.

See the back of your box for full disc contents.

NEXT ISSUE OF PC GAMES ADDICT ON SALE MAY 4

"THE RTS YOU WERE LOOKING FOR?"

HANDS ON WITH STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

All magazine contents and gifts subject to change. Some gifts not available overseas.

REVIEWS
The Matrix Online
The Bard's Tale
Silent Hunter 3
Empire Earth 2

PREVIEWS
Dragonshard
Time Shift
Battlestations
Midway

DEMOS
Brothers in Arms
Lego Star Wars
Project Snowblind
Silent Hunter 3

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D-I-Y: Make your own Pacific Assault map

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Have Pyro produced the first 'total' war game?

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